



FINDINGS OF CONCERN

Marine Safety Unit Morgan City

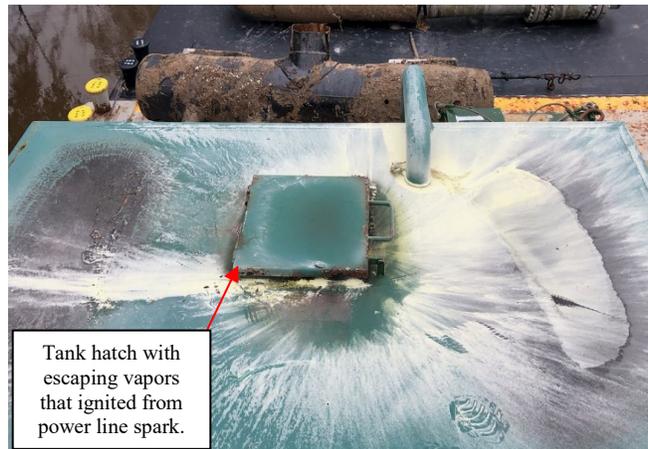
March 17, 2021
Morgan City, LA

Findings of Concern 003 - 21

RISK OF HIGH PROFILE VESSELS TRANSITING UNDER OVERHEAD POWER LINES

Purpose. The U.S. Coast Guard issues findings of concern to disseminate information related to unsafe conditions that were identified as causal factors in a casualty and could contribute to future incidents. Findings of concern are intended to educate the public, state, or local agencies about the conditions discovered so they may address the findings with an appropriate voluntary action or highlight existing applicable company policies or state/local regulations.

The Incident. On December 14, 2020, an uninspected spud barge being pushed by a towing vessel on Bayou Teche off the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway in Charenton, LA hit an energized high voltage power line that crossed above the channel. As a result, the power line parted with one end of the line landing on a mobile storage container on the barge, which contained pipeline waste. As the line touched the metal tank near the cargo hatch, sparks ignited escaping vapors causing a small fire, which the crew was able to extinguish with an onboard fire extinguisher. Upon investigating the incident, the U.S. Coast Guard determined that the overhead power lines were not being properly maintained as charted on the applicable navigation chart.



Aftermath of the fire that ignited near the cargo hatch after sparks from the active power line ignited escaping fumes.

Contributing Factors and Analysis. At the time of the incident, the overhead power line was charted on the navigational chart at a height of 65-feet. The highest spud on the barge was measured at a maximum 50-feet with an air draft of approximately 45-feet on the starboard bow. The vessel had made several lower clearance prior to the allision including transiting under a bridge charted at 50-feet. Upon survey of the power lines after the incident, the measured height of the power lines was 51-feet. Although power lines in the area are required to be permitted by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), there is no requirement to conduct periodic surveys to verify overhead power lines crossing a navigable waterway remain at their permitted height. In addition, the original company that received the permit for the power lines involved in this incident was no longer the owner. The new owners of the power lines had no knowledge of the permit requirements or responsibility of maintaining the power lines at their charted height. It is unknown why the power line clearance height changed since the permitted installation.



UNITED STATES COAST GUARD

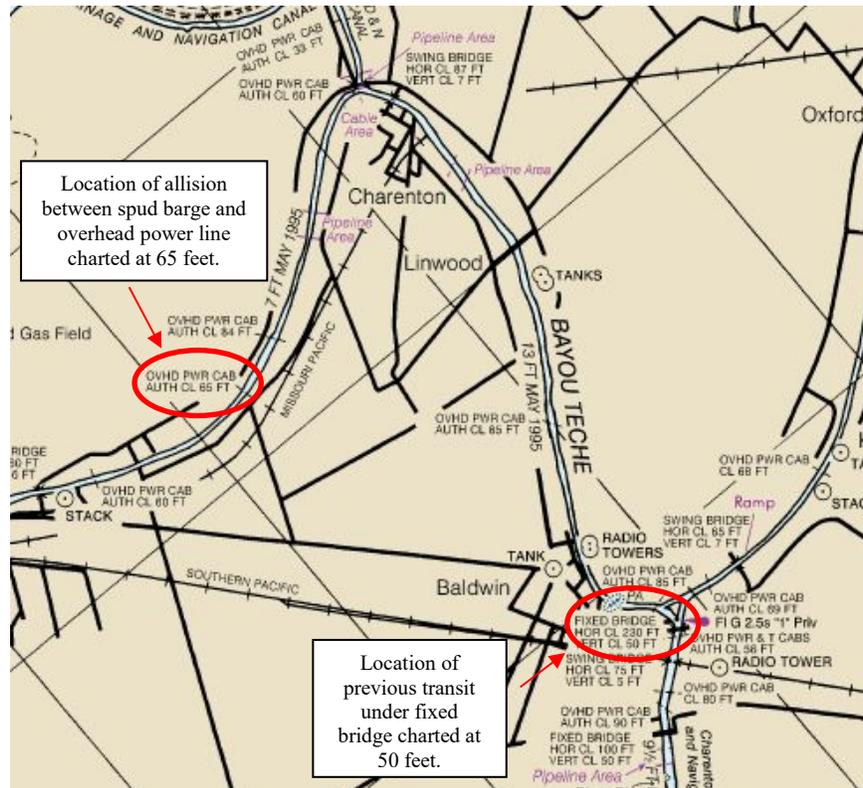
U.S. Department of Homeland Security

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Findings of Concern. The U.S. Coast Guard strongly encourages Coast Guard Sector Waterway Divisions, the USACE, and owners of overhead obstructions crossing navigation channels to:

- Companies: Voluntarily conduct periodic surveys to ensure the height of overhead obstructions is in accordance with any approved permits and navigation charts.
- USCG: Ensure surveys are conducted by Coast Guard response teams and power companies following major storm events such as ice and wind storms.
- USACE: Consider creating requirements for permit holders to conduct surveys at a regular interval and after events that would likely have an impact on height to ensure all overhead obstructions over navigable waterways remain in compliance with approved permits.

Closing. These findings of concern are provided for informational purpose only and do not relieve any domestic or international safety, operational, or material requirements. For any questions or comments please contact MSU Morgan City Investigations Division by phone at (985) 380-5339 or by email at MCIO@uscg.mil.