



FINDINGS OF CONCERN

Marine Safety Detachment Vicksburg

September 16, 2024
Vicksburg, MS

Findings of Concern 008-24

UNSAFE VEHICLE TRANSPORT PRACTICES

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 March 27, 2023, an uninspected towing vessel with an uninspected deck barge in a hip tow configuration, carrying two vehicles with one passenger in each, departed the Mississippi side of Old River, a tributary of the Mississippi River. This short river crossing, conducted for almost 40 years, routinely shuttled passengers and equipment to a private island. As the transit began, the towing vessel Master noticed the rear vehicle with a loaded trailer rolling backwards but was unable to gain the attention of the passenger in the vehicle by use of the ship's whistle. The vehicle entered the water with one person in the cab. Tragically, this event resulted in a loss of life.

Contributing Factors and Analysis. The Coast Guard's investigation determined contributing factors that led to this casualty. While the investigation revealed the primary factor leading to the loss of life was the lack of procedures to verify the equipment was secured on the barge, there were also several additional factors that contributed to the casualty or were identified as unsafe conditions. Crewmembers onboard the vessel did not verify that the vehicles on the barge were in park with the parking brake engaged. No chocks for the vehicle's tires were provided or in place. The passenger barge was not equipped with a safety chain or bar to prevent vehicles from rolling off the vessel. Crewmembers did not provide a safety orientation or flotation devices to the passengers before getting underway.

Findings of Concern. Coast Guard investigators have identified the following preventive measures to mitigate the risks associated with the contributing factors identified above. All owners and operators with similar vessel operations should consider the following voluntary safety measures:

- Provide cargo/vehicle stowage procedures for crewmembers to follow before getting underway.
- Instruct crewmembers to verify that passenger vehicles are parked, engines off, and parking brake engaged before the vessel gets underway.
- Chock the tires of all vehicles on the vessel or barge to prohibit vehicle movement while the vessel is moving.



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- Install a bar or chain of adequate strength that needs to be raised or moved for the vehicles to enter or depart the vessel.
- Have the crew provide a safety orientation before getting underway to all passengers, with instructions on emergency procedures, PFD stowage location and wearing a lifejacket while the vessel is moving.



Figure 1. Photograph of deck barge post casualty with recommended bar installation on bow and stern.

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 the USCG Marine Safety Detachment Vicksburg Investigations Division, at (601) 636-5516 or by email at stl-smb-msdvicksburg-investigations@uscg.mil.