



FINDINGS OF CONCERN

Sector Corpus Christi

December 13, 2021
Corpus Christi, TX

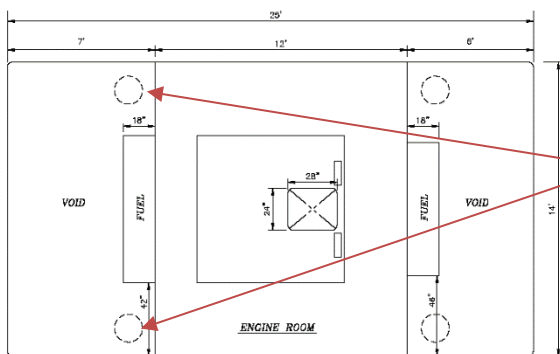
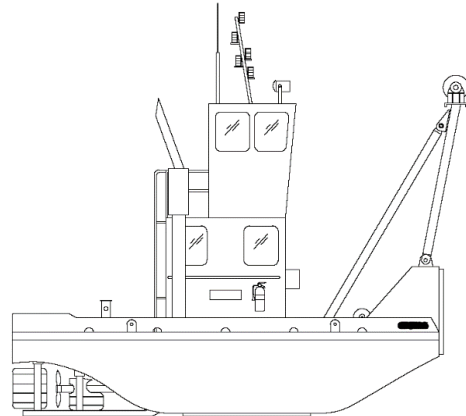
Findings of Concern 020-22

MAINTENANCE & OPERATION OF UNINSPECTED TOWING VESSELS

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. In December 2019, while underway in a channel transiting to a dredge, an uninspected dredge tender sank which resulted in the loss of life of a deckhand who was located in the engine room.

Contributing Factors and Analysis. At the time of the incident, a small craft advisory with gale conditions was in effect with strong winds, light showers, and seas between 4-6 feet. The vessel had a small crack on the hull of the stern, causing a slow, controlled ingress of water that had to be dewatered by the crew daily. The dredge tender's crew consisted of non-credentialed personnel who were inexperienced and minimally trained. Additionally, the company's personnel believed that the vessel was "unsinkable" even if the stern void space was filled with water. The vessel's radio communications systems were inoperable, and the operator was relying on his cell phone to communicate with the dredge. Prior to the transit back to the dredge, the operator assumed the deckhand closed the stern hatches, but did not check the hatches or ask the deckhand if they were closed. During the transit back to the dredge, the operator took the turn into the channel from a canal at one quarter throttle when the vessel hit a swell, resulting in the operator suddenly falling back into his seat. He then increased the speed to half throttle as an unknown amount of water entered the stern void space. Expecting that the water on the deck from the swell would drain from the deck, the operator moved the throttle



The vessel's bottom deck was divided into 3 watertight spaces, the stern void space with the two hatches open, the middle engine room space with the hatch open, and the remaining forward void space that remained intact and caused the bow to bob along the channel floor.



UNITED STATES COAST GUARD

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back to neutral when the vessel began to flood quickly by the stern. The operator was able to abandon ship, but the deckhand was caught in the engine room two decks below the operating station and was unable to be rescued.



Both stern hatches (port stern hatch pictured) which open to the same compartment were found open. The right picture depicts the engine room hatch open which would have accelerated the downward flooding.

Findings of Concern. The U.S. Coast Guard strongly encourages uninspected towing vessels, such as dredge tenders and small workboats, to implement the following:

- **TRAINING** – Ensure all personnel onboard receive training on the safe operation of their vessel including proper communication, mitigation measures during inclement weather, how inclement weather can impact a vessels stability, and the importance of maintaining the vessel’s watertight integrity.
- **MAINTENANCE** - Ensure that vessel communication systems and watertight hatches are properly maintained and are secured during transit.
- **OPERATION** – Ensure vessel operators and crewmembers are familiar with the relevant characteristics of the vessel, including maneuvering characteristics and vessel stability.

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 Sector Corpus Christi Investigations Division by phone at (361) 939-5140 or by email at CorpusChristiIO@uscg.mil.