



National Transportation Safety Board

Marine Accident Brief

Sinking of Offshore Supply Vessel *Ricky B*

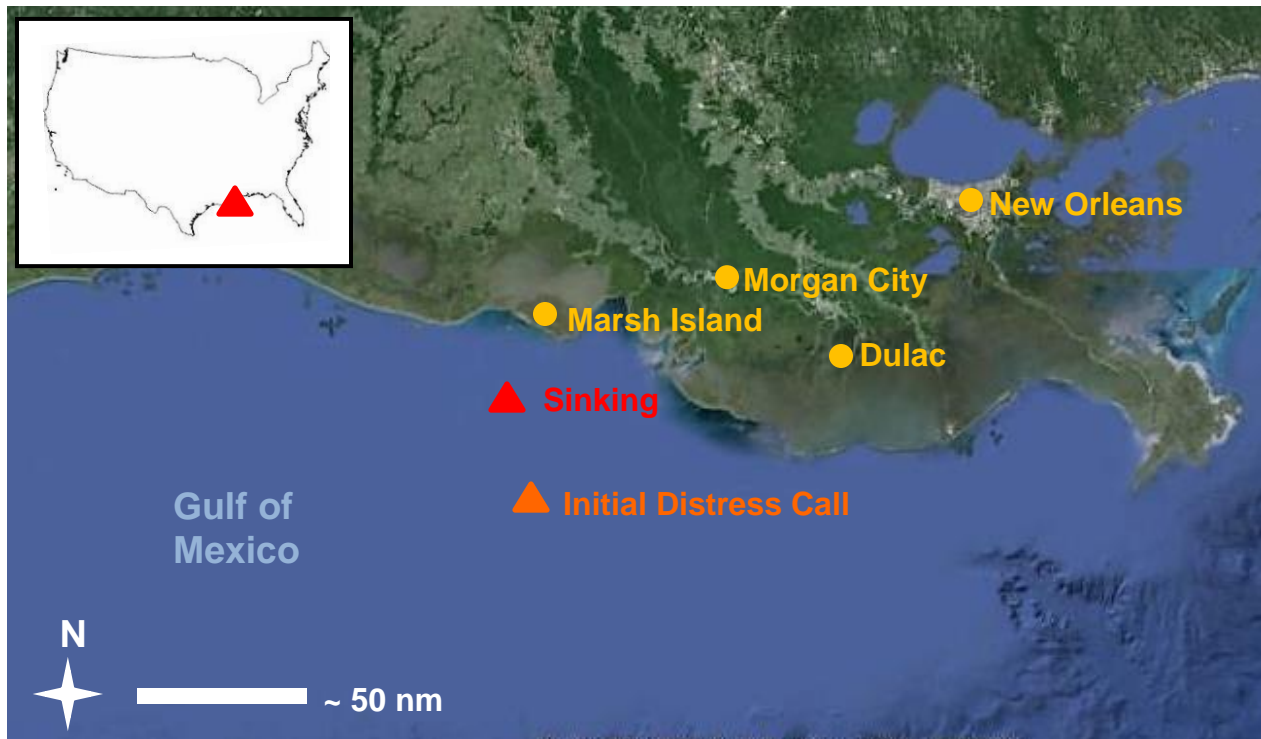
Accident no.	DCA-13-LM-024
Vessel name	<i>Ricky B</i>
Accident type	Sinking
Location	Gulf of Mexico, 24 nautical miles (nm) south of Marsh Island, Louisiana 29° 05.6' N, 091° 59.6' W
Date	May 30, 2013
Time	0702 central daylight time (coordinated universal time – 5 hours)
Injuries	None
Damage	\$520,000
Environmental damage	Sheen reported from an estimated 800 gallons of marine diesel fuel on board, which dissipated due to open water, weather, and sea state in the area. Debris field from on-deck cargo, including empty 600-gallon fuel totes and multiple grocery boxes.
Weather	Winds at 8 knots from the east. Seas at 2–3 feet. Partly cloudy, with 10 nm of visibility. Air temperature 79°F and water temperature 78°F.
Waterway information	North central Gulf of Mexico, populated with numerous offshore oil production platforms and drilling rigs.

On May 30, 2013, at 0702 central daylight time, the offshore supply vessel *Ricky B* sank in the Gulf of Mexico about 24 nm south of Marsh Island, Louisiana, while being towed. The three crewmembers had abandoned the *Ricky B* earlier and boarded a good samaritan vessel, from which they were subsequently transferred to a nearby manned oil platform. No one was injured. The *Ricky B* was later refloated. Its damage was estimated to be \$520,000.



The *Ricky B*. (Photo provided by Louisiana Marine Operators)

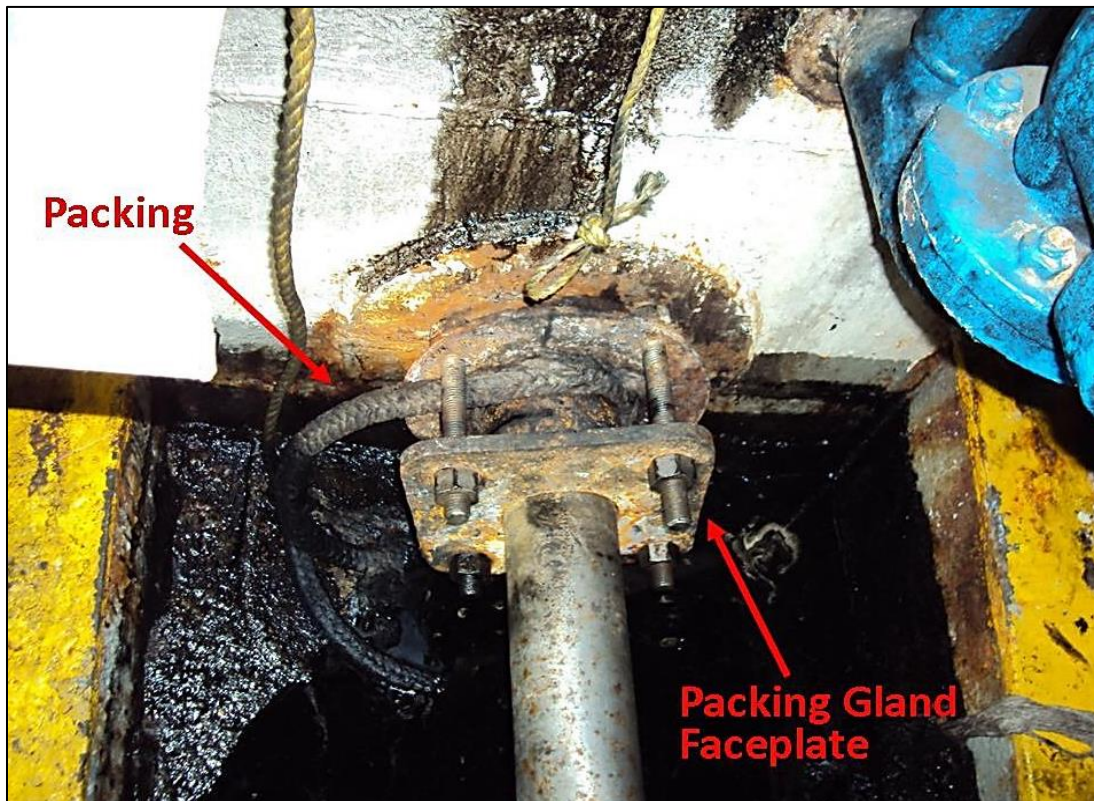
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Satellite image showing the locations of the *Ricky B*'s initial distress call and subsequent sinking. (Background by Google Earth)

In the days leading up to the sinking, the *Ricky B* had been conducting supply runs to various oil and gas production platforms located 30–40 nm off the Louisiana coast. Two days before the sinking, on May 28, 2013, about 2100, a high bilge alarm activated on board the *Ricky B*. The mate entered the engine room where he noted that the starboard shaft seal packing was damaged and leaking. The mate woke the off-duty master to inform him of the situation, and both individuals returned to the engine room to assess the leak. According to the master, a piece of the packing material was found in the bilge under the starboard shaft seal system, and in his opinion the water was “coming in too hard” to attempt to repack the system. The crew disengaged the starboard engine and, using the port engine, maneuvered the *Ricky B* to a nearby platform where they tied off the vessel to attempt a repair. The crew managed to tighten the four nuts that secured the packing gland faceplate to the through-hull penetration, and this action slowed the ingress of water to a rate that was reportedly within the capacity of the vessel’s bilge pump.

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The photo shows the *Ricky B's* starboard shaft seal system after the vessel was refloated. Salvage personnel installed the packing material seen protruding from the shaft seal system, and refitted the packing gland faceplate.

After the field repair was completed, the crew proceeded with the *Ricky B's* intended supply run to another platform about 16 nm to the north, using only the vessel's port engine. The master told investigators that the starboard shaft seal system continued to leak throughout the night and into the early morning on May 29, but that the vessel's bilge pump was able to "keep the water below the deck plates" in the engine room. About 1030, with the master on watch, the vessel departed the platform for its home port of Dulac, Louisiana, still using only the port engine. The master stated that he was making rounds in the engine room every 30 minutes to monitor the flooding situation. About 1045, the mate relieved the master of the watch, and sometime later, for unknown reasons, decided to engage the starboard engine at clutch speed. Clutch speed is the slowest speed at which the engine can rotate the propeller shaft.

About 1130, the mate noticed that the bilge pump was no longer keeping up with the ingress of water. He then aligned the appropriate piping in the ballast manifold and started the ballast pump to assist the bilge pump with dewatering the engine room. However, this action was unsuccessful, and about 1230, the ballast pump ceased to operate due to the rising water level in the engine room. The mate woke the master and then radioed a distress call, which was received by US Coast Guard Sector New Orleans. Shortly thereafter, the crew shut down both main engines, but the generator and the bilge pump were left running and continued to operate until the water level reached a point where these systems failed.

The crew of a nearby vessel, *Miss Monica*, responded to the *Ricky B's* distress call. The crew of the *Miss Monica* supplied a compressed air-driven dewatering pump, which the crew of the *Ricky B* activated to attempt to dewater. However, that effort was unsuccessful. The crew of the *Ricky B* also tried to activate a gasoline-powered dewatering pump that had been airdropped

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by a Coast Guard C-130 aircraft responding from Mobile, Alabama. That too was unsuccessful because the watertight seal on the airdrop case containing the pump had failed and allowed water into the case, which rendered the pump nonoperational. At 1400, the master deployed the *Ricky B*'s anchor, sealed access to the engine room, activated the vessel's emergency position indicating radio beacon (EPIRB), and then joined the mate and the deckhand who had already abandoned the vessel to the *Miss Monica*. The crew of the *Miss Monica* transferred all three crewmembers to a nearby manned platform.

Early the following day, about 0215 on May 30, the towing vessel *Delta Force* arrived at the location of the anchored *Ricky B*, which was still partially afloat. The crew of the *Delta Force* began towing the *Ricky B* toward shore. However, at 0702, the *Ricky B* completely submerged and sank in about 50 feet of water, some 24 nm south of Marsh Island.

About 2.5 weeks later, on June 17, the *Ricky B* was lifted to the surface by a contracted salvage team for dewatering. On entering the engine room, the salvage supervisor discovered that three of the four nuts that secured the packing gland faceplate to the shaft sealing system were loose, and the plate was offset 3–4 inches, allowing water to flow freely into the vessel. The salvage supervisor removed the packing gland faceplate, installed new packing material, and then reinstalled the packing gland faceplate, effectively making the gland watertight. The vessel was dewatered and then towed to a shipyard in Morgan City, Louisiana, to be examined and repaired or scrapped.

Postsinking toxicological testing was performed on all three crewmembers, and the mate's urine specimen tested positive for cocaine. The mate's use of this illegal drug may have contributed to the sinking because of his decision to engage the starboard propulsion shaft even though he knew that it had been shut down due to a severe seal leak. In addition, although the crewmembers stated that they had tightened the bolts that secured the starboard shaft packing gland faceplate, this was not the condition in which the salvage team found the starboard shaft seal when the vessel was examined immediately after refloating.

Probable Cause

The National Transportation Safety Board determines that the probable cause of the sinking of the offshore supply vessel *Ricky B* was the crew's failure to adequately assess the severity of the flooding rate through the starboard shaft seal gland and take prudent action to mitigate the situation.

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Vessel Particulars

Vessel	<i>Ricky B</i>
Owner/operator	D & B Boat Rentals, Inc./J & J Boats, LLC.
Port of registry	New Iberia, Louisiana
Flag	US
Type	Offshore supply vessel
Year built	1981
Official number (US)	638903
IMO number	N/A
Construction	Steel
Length	110 ft (33.5 m)
Draft	8.4 ft (2.6 m)
Beam/width	24 ft (7.3 m)
Gross tonnage	89 gross tons
Engine power; manufacturer	2 Detroit Diesel 12V71 at 450 hp (335 kW) each; fixed pitch propellers
Persons on board	3

For more details about this accident, visit www.nts.gov/investigations/dms.html and search for NTSB accident ID DCA13LM024.

Adopted: January 21, 2014

The NTSB has authority to investigate and establish the probable cause of any major marine casualty or any marine casualty involving both public and nonpublic vessels under 49 *United States Code* 1131. This report is based on factual information provided by the US Coast Guard from its informal investigation of the accident. An NTSB investigator examined the vessel after it was refloated and drydocked in Morgan City.
