



FINDINGS OF CONCERN

Sector Hampton Roads

August 13, 2019
Norfolk, Virginia

Findings of Concern 013-19

PREMATURE BRIDGE DEPARTURE FROM OUTBOUND PILOTED 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. On the morning of January 10, 2019, a Panama-flagged bulk cargo vessel was outbound at the mouth of the Chesapeake Bay after departing Baltimore, Maryland. The vessel was 958 feet long, carrying 120,000 metric tons of coal, and had a draft of 47 feet. The wind was out of the Northwest at approximately 35 knots. The tide was ebbing, with a low tide calculated to occur at the Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel at 0428 EST. As the vessel transited down Cape Henry Channel and approached the pilotage area, the vessel exited the Northeast side of the channel and grounded on a muddy bottom at the vessel's midship area. At 0945 EST, the vessel came free under its own power with the rising tide. A dive survey was conducted and revealed that the hull was intact and damage free from the grounding.

Contributing Factors and Analysis. The investigation identified the Maryland State Pilot's actions leading up to the grounding as one of many contributing factors to the incident. The Pilot stowed his personal pilot unit (PPU) thirty minutes prior to the grounding, and was coordinating disembarkation arrangements with the launch on scene as the vessel was still in a turn while transiting down the narrow channel in 35-knot winds. Although the Pilot had not yet departed the bridge of the foreign-flagged vessel, his attention was not completely focused on the safe navigation of the vessel. Additionally, the investigation identified that the local Regulated Navigational Area (RNA) has pilotage requirements in 33 CFR 165.501(d)(6)(iii). The investigation revealed times that outbound Maryland State Pilots were prematurely departing their assigned vessels inland of the demarcation line, which is still within the inland waters of the RNA and not in compliance with the regulatory requirements.

Findings of Concern. Coast Guard investigators have identified the following measures that all State Pilot Associations should consider to mitigate the risks associated with the above identified factors

- Pilots should remain on the bridge of their assigned vessel until the vessel passes seaward of the demarcation line.
- Pilots should keep their PPU in use for navigational assistance until the vessel passes seaward of the demarcation line.



UNITED STATES COAST GUARD
U.S. Department of Homeland Security

FINDINGS OF CONCERN

Sector Hampton Roads

- Delay Pilot launch arrivals for outbound vessels until the vessels are in the charted pilotage area.

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 Hampton Roads Investigations Division by phone at (757) 668-5540 or by email at secthr@uscg.mil.