



USCGD17 SAFETY ALERT: SPV001-2008

June 10, 2008

Juneau, AK

Background: The Seventeenth Coast Guard District Small Passenger Vessel Safety Alert program was developed to provide timely safety related marine casualty information to mariners with the goal of preventing similar incidents. This program is part of an ongoing effort to apply Prevention through People (PTP) principles to improve safety.

2008 Incidents: To date in 2008, there have been two significant incidents.

- The grounding of the SPIRIT OF ALASKA in Tracy Arm, Alaska.
- The PTARMIGAN collision with an iceberg in Portage Lake resulting in 20 injuries with two transported to the hospital for further evaluation.

Discussion: The cause of each incident is under investigation. To prevent similar casualties, the USCG strongly recommends that all passenger vessel owners, operators and crew members review their company standards of care with an emphasis on situational awareness and bridge resource management, operational and safety policies, and emergency procedures. Situational awareness is critical at all times, but especially when passengers are on board, or when the weather, sea state, and activity level lower our levels of risk perception, and increase the chance that we may fall into a false sense of security.

We are still early in the 2008 summer season. Using these two incidents as examples of what can go wrong, now is the perfect time to review your operations and stress your standards of care and safety procedures to all crew members.

Recommended Action: Operators are encouraged to:

- Be “safety vigilant”. **DO NOT BE COMPLACENT** when it comes to operational safety.
- Schedule the time to review and emphasize your standards of care, safety expectations and operational procedures with all members. Regular short safety briefs are encouraged. A copy of the Alaska Small Passenger Vessel Safety Task Force’s top ten “Standards of Care” are included in this alert.
- Train and orientate new employees. Make sure they have the tools to succeed not only on a daily basis, but also during an emergency.
- Emphasize situational awareness and bridge resource management procedures for all vessel crew members.
- Review emergency response procedures. Continue to conduct your emergency response drills.
- Conduct safety checks or audits for all vessels in your fleet. Observe your crews in action. Identify and correct issues before they become habits.

- Ensure your vessels continue to meet all regulatory requirements. If questions arise, contact your local Coast Guard Sector Command or Marine Safety Unit/Detachment. Fix those little problems today before they become the big problems tomorrow.

Emergency Assistance: All vessels in distress are reminded to notify the USCG immediately via VHF CH16 or other available means. This will ensure Search and Rescue resources are rapidly alerted and dispatched as required by the incident.

As a reminder, Alaska's Top 10 Standards of Care for Small Passenger Vessels, as developed by the 2000 Safety Task Force, are listed below.

1. **Situational Awareness:** Define company standards and procedures for knowing what is happening at all times - both on and also around the vessel. This may include procedures for deteriorating weather, policy of donning PFDs, procedures for monitoring sea sick passengers, identifying and enforcing areas on board where passengers may view wildlife from, monitoring radio communications and radar traffic, awareness of conflicting traffic, the presence of smaller vessels in the area (kayaks) that may be impacted by the vessel's wake, etc
2. **Area Familiarity:** Define company area familiarity qualification process: how many pre-transits of the areas with an experienced mariner are required. As a minimum, ensure your requirements meet any legal requirements for vessel and class of service. Define how operators will demonstrate their knowledge of the waters, navigation aids, hazards, and vessel traffic patterns, rules and protocols. Define the refresher trainer requirements.
3. **Bridge Resource Management:** Define the company process for bridge management. Who does what? Clarify expectations, training requirements, procedures, policies. Are exceptions permitted and under what situations? Make sure all crew members know how they mesh and their importance to this standard. How will electronic charts be utilized? What position fixes are required? As required, identify specific procedures for difficult navigation areas.
4. **Restricting Passengers from Bridge:** Define conditions, locations and other situations where passengers will not be permitted on the bridge. Make sure passengers are aware of the standards beforehand to avoid problems.
5. **Communications:** This can be viewed from both a hardware and a procedural perspective. Does the company have the equipment available to communicate with the home office and emergency responders everywhere along its route? If not, what is the acceptable level for "no communication" capability? If 100% communication capability is the desired standard, then additional equipment may be required. From a procedural view, define where, when, what and how vessels are to report. Detail your standards of care for keeping passengers informed of the situation during and emergency.
6. **Safe Distance from Known Navigation Hazards:** Specify company policy for safe distances to maintain from navigation hazards. You can keep this a general standard, or make it hazard specific. As required, prohibit transit of certain areas at all times, or on specific tides, current, or other weather conditions.
7. **Reduce Speed in Hazardous Situations:** This may seem like common sense, but don't bet the farm that it will automatically happen. Define company specific standards of care during voyages with heavy seas, restricted visibility, ice conditions or other hazardous conditions.
8. **Charts:** Electronic charts verses paper charts. For paper charts, what is the standard for updating or replacing, who is responsible for development of customized charts, how will information be shared between crews? Remember, customized, accurate and updated charts, complete with annotations of track lines, danger bearings and distances from hazards and other information, can help ensure safe navigation. For electronic charts, what program is utilized, demonstration of skill,

level of training, and navigation limitations / concerns with electronic chart use? How will your electronic charts be corrected and updated?

9. **Emergency Preparedness:** Develop, train, and keep readily accessible, emergency check lists specific to your company that outline actions the crew should take in the event of sinking, grounding, fire, medical evacuation, taking on water, etc. Conduct training to the checklists, and exercise the checklists using various scenarios.

10. **Equipment:** The capabilities and limitations of your vessel's navigation and safety equipment including, but not limited to, the vessel's charting programs, GPS, fathometer, radios and autopilot. With respect to communications, operators should know where they have good communications and where communications are poor or non-existent. Crews shall be familiar with the vessel's lifesaving equipment and operation.

All operators and crew are encouraged to read past lessons learned posted at the [Safety Alerts and Lessons Learned website](#).