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CALIFORNIA BOARD OF PILOT COMMISSIONERS INVESTIGATION CITES PILOT ERROR IN COSCO BUSAN ACCIDENT

The Board of Pilot Commissioners today issued a report of the investigation by its Incident Review Committee ("IRC") of the accident on November 7, 2007, in which the M/V COSCO BUSAN, under the navigational control of Captain John Cota, a Board-licensed pilot, struck one of the towers of the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge, damaging the ship and releasing over 50,000 gallons of fuel oil into the waters of San Francisco Bay. The entire text of the report can be found here, <http://www.pilotcommission.org/>.

The purpose of the IRC's investigation was to determine whether there was pilot error or misconduct on the part of Captain Cota, and if so, whether such misconduct was sufficient to warrant the suspension or revocation of his state pilot license. Subsequent to the completion of the IRC investigation, Captain Cota turned in his state pilot license and retired. Accordingly, the matter did not go through a hearing before an Administrative Law Judge. Nevertheless, a report of the investigation is required under the California Harbors and Navigation Code.

As a result of its investigation, the IRC concluded that pilot negligence was a factor in the accident. The IRC report summarized its conclusions as follows:

- (1) Captain Cota failed to utilize all available resources to determine visibility conditions along his intended route when it was obvious that he would have to make the transit to sea in significantly reduced visibility;
- (2) Captain Cota had exhibited significant concerns about the condition of the ship's radar and a lack of familiarity with the ship's electronic chart system, but failed to properly take those concerns into account in deciding to proceed;
- (3) Captain Cota failed to ensure that his plans for the transit and how to deal with the conditions of reduced visibility had been clearly communicated and discussed with the master;
- (5) Once underway, Captain Cota proceeded at an unsafe speed for the conditions of visibility;
- (6) When Captain Cota began making his approach to the Bay Bridge, he noted further reduced visibility and then reportedly lost confidence with the ship's radar. While he could have turned south to safe anchorage to await improved visibility or to determine what, if anything was wrong with the radar, Captain Cota failed to exercise sound judgment and instead continued on the intended transit of the M/V Cosco Busan, relying on an electronic chart system with which he was unfamiliar.

(7) Captain Cota failed to utilize all available resources to determine his position before committing the ship to its transit under the Bay Bridge.

“The Cosco Busan incident was a very serious event that caused substantial economic and environmental damage,” said Knute Michael Miller, President of the Board of Pilot Commissioners. “The Board’s IRC investigation has brought to light many examples of human error that contributed to the accident. We hope that the report will serve as a constructive aid to pilots, other mariners, and to the public at large as we deal with the challenges of water-borne commerce in the 21st century.”

The Board of Pilot Commissioners for the Bays of San Francisco, San Pablo and Suisun was established in 1850 to provide State oversight for the San Francisco bar pilots. The Commission licenses and regulates maritime pilots navigating San Francisco Bay and its tributaries as far inland as the Ports of Stockton and Sacramento, and In Monterey Bay. The Board's responsibilities include training, incident investigation and rate determination.

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