

SAFETY ALERT

Volume XIX Issue: 001

Time: 1631

Date: 25 MAR 2019

TOWING VESSEL SAFETY ALERT

Recently there were three marine casualties that resulted in the sinking of towing vessels on the Lower Mississippi River. One of the casualties resulted in a fatality. These cases are all under investigation by the Coast Guard, but the preliminary fact finding indicates there are some similarities between the three incidents. In all three cases, the towing vessels became pinned against another object in a position that exposed the vessel to very strong currents acting directly on the beam. Once in this position, the vessels could not recover and sank.

The high water conditions on the Mississippi River present numerous risks for towing vessels, including unusually strong river currents and dynamic eddies. These river currents are often different from one section of the river to another; therefore it is absolutely essential that vessel operators provide a wide berth when maneuvering around any other vessel or object. For reference, when a river current is flowing at 1 knot, the water is moving at 1.7 feet per second, or approximately 100 feet per minute. This means that in a 6 knot current, the water is moving about the length of a football field in just 30 seconds.

The U.S. Coast Guard strongly recommends that towing vessel owners, operators, and other responsible parties take the following measures:

- Avoid transiting between two anchored vessels, between two barge fleets, or between any other set of stationary objects.
- Minimize the number of operations which require the vessel to be positioned beam-to the river current.
- Establish minimum distances between the towing vessel and another vessel/object prior to conducting any operation that requires the vessel to be positioned beam-to the current.

This alert is provided for informational purposes only and does not relieve any domestic or international safety, operational or material requirement. Questions regarding this safety alert may be sent to the Sector New Orleans Waterways Management Division at Secnola-Wpm@uscg.mil or the Sector New Orleans Inspections Division at NolaDom@uscg.mil.



CAPTAIN K. M. LUTTRELL
Captain of the Port New Orleans