



Marine Fact Sheet

March 2010

Emergency Preparedness on Ferries

The Problem

Emergency preparedness on large passenger ferries operating in Canada needs improvement.

Background

Passenger ferries play a significant role in the Canadian transportation network, with tens of millions of passengers travelling each year. More than 100 passenger vessels above 500 gross tons are operating in Canada, and roughly half of these can carry over 400 people.

During an emergency, it is essential that all passengers be accounted for and, in the case of an abandonment, for example, that they board survival craft in an organized, efficient manner. In these situations, crew members face distinct challenges, including: crowd control, communicating in multiple languages, identifying and locating missing passengers, high passenger-to-crew ratios, and passengers requiring special assistance—such as those who have difficulties with hearing, sight, or mobility.

Past TSB investigations involving two passenger ferries—*Queen of the North*¹ and *Joseph and Clara Smallwood*²—highlighted safety deficiencies in how emergency duties and training are performed. Canadian regulations, for example, require passenger vessels to have procedures for rapid and safe evacuation of everyone, yet there is no requirement to carry out drills involving crowd-control duties before evacuation. Full-scale abandonment exercises remain voluntary, leaving crew members without the knowledge or skills to adequately perform emergency duties.

Solution

When people are faced with an emergency, the response of those who have received training and practice is more automatic and requires less interpretation and decision making. This amounts to precious time saved—time that is even more vital when lives are at stake. It is therefore critical that crew members have access to detailed, accurate passenger lists, and that crews be *practiced* at mustering and crowd-control.

- Large ferry operators must adopt and practice effective emergency preparedness procedures. This includes maintaining detailed passengers lists and practicing evacuations.

Our Mission

The Transportation Safety Board of Canada (TSB) is an independent agency that makes transportation safer by investigating marine, pipeline, rail, and air transportation accidents and communicating the results to Canadians.

For more information, visit the TSB website at www.bst-tsb.gc.ca or contact the TSB Communications Branch by telephone at 819-994-8053 or by e-mail at communications@bst-tsb.gc.ca.

¹ TSB Investigation Report M06W0052

² TSB Investigation Report M03N0050