December 12, 2025 MIR-25-47

Contact of Towing Vessel *Schweiger* with US Coast Guard Station Cape Disappointment Docks

On September 11, 2024, the towing vessel *Schweiger* was transiting the Baker Bay West Channel near Ilwaco, Washington, when it struck the US Coast Guard Station Cape Disappointment docks about 1236 local time, after it veered out of the channel (see figure 1 and figure 2).[1] There were no injuries. About 20 gallons of diesel fuel spilled into the waterway as a result of the contact. The *Schweiger* was undamaged. Damage to the station infrastructure was estimated to exceed $750,000.

Figure 1. *Schweiger* moored at Port of Ilwaco, September 2024.

[1] (a) In this report, all times are Pacific daylight time, and all miles are nautical miles (1.15 statute miles). (b) Visit ntsb.gov to find additional information in the public docket for this NTSB investigation (case no. DCA24FM061). Use the CAROL Query to search investigations.

Casualty Summary

NTSB casualty category	Contact
Location	Baker Bay West Channel, Ilwaco, Washington 46°16.88′ N, 124°3.14′ W
Date	September 11, 2024
Time	1236 Pacific daylight time (coordinated universal time –7 hrs)
Persons on board	2
Injuries	None
Property damage	$750,000 est.
Environmental damage	20 gal diesel fuel
Weather	Visibility 10 mi, overcast, winds west-southwest 10 kts, air temperature 65°F, water temperature 58°F, sunrise 0650, sunset 1934
Waterway information	Channel, width 200 ft, depth 16 ft

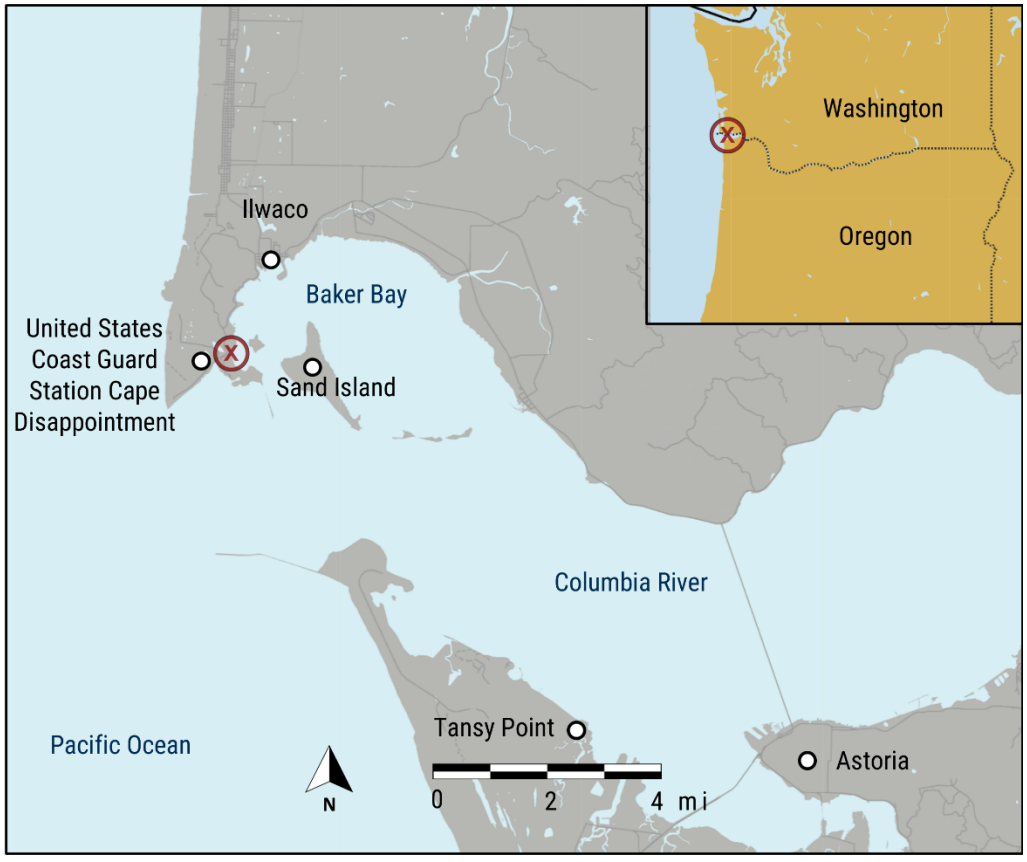

Figure 2. Area of *Schweiger* contact, as indicated by a circled *X*. (Background source: Google Maps)

1 Factual Information

1.1 Background

The 60-foot-long *Schweiger* was a towing vessel constructed of steel, was built in 1979, and was owned and operated by Advanced American Construction Inc. The vessel primarily pushed barges in support of marine construction projects in the Pacific Northwest region. The vessel was fitted with flanking and steering deflector high-lift rudders. Propulsion was provided by two 1,140-hp diesel engines, driving dual propellers with Kort nozzles. The vessel was operated from a crow's nest pilothouse, elevated above the main superstructure, that was only accessible by an external ladder. The *Schweiger* had a valid US Coast Guard-issued certificate of inspection documenting compliance with Title 46 *Code of Federal Regulations* Subchapter M. The vessel did not have a pilothouse alerter system installed, nor was one required for towing vessels less than 65 feet.

Coast Guard Station Cape Disappointment, located at the mouth of the Columbia River near Ilwaco, Washington, was a search and rescue station, home to the National Motor Lifeboat School. The station had fixed and floating docks, wave barriers, two boathouses and a fueling system, and was located along the Baker Bay West Channel, which connected the main channel of the Columbia River to the Port of Ilwaco (see figure 3).

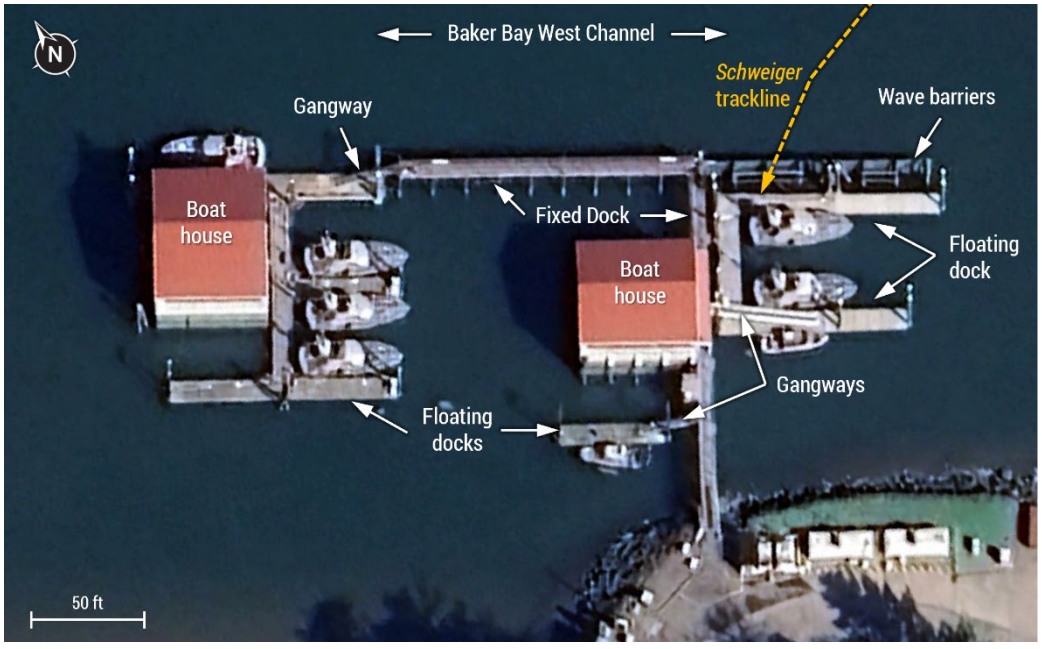

Figure 3. Overview of US Coast Guard Station Cape Disappointment (Background source: Google Earth)

1.2 Event Sequence

On September 11, 2024, the two-person crew of the *Schweiger*—a captain and a deckhand—arrived at Ilwaco Marina in the Port of Ilwaco about 0545 to begin preparations to get underway. They were headed to the southeastern end of Sand Island to pick up a barge and additional personnel and then transit to Tansy Point, Oregon, to assist with a marine construction project. That day, the captain and deckhand commuted locally to the towing vessel and planned to work a day shift beginning about 0600. As required by the operating company's policy, their shift was not to exceed 12 hours per day.

About 0634, the *Schweiger,* with the captain at the helm and the deckhand aboard, departed the marina. The *Schweiger* transited lightboat (not pushing any barges) through the Baker Bay West Channel and arrived at the Sand Island, Oregon, mooring about 0719. After conducting a project safety brief and connecting a barge, the *Schweiger* departed Sand Island about 0915, arriving at Tansey Point on the Oregon bank near the mouth of the Columbia River about 1028.

After dropping the barge at Tansy Point, about 1140, the captain and deckhand got the *Schweiger* underway lightboat to return to the Port of Ilwaco. The crew entered Baker Bay West Channel about 1227 while traveling about 7.5 knots. At 1233:47, the captain steered the *Schweiger* to port from the 306° leg of the channel to the 284° leg, keeping along the red (right) side of the channel.

According to the vessel's automatic identification system (AIS) recorded track, at 1235:12, the *Schweiger*'s course altered slightly to port toward the middle of the channel. Then, a little less than a minute later, the *Schweiger* veered to port as the vessel exited the marked channel toward the US Coast Guard Station Cape Disappointment dock.

At 1236:25, the *Schweiger* struck the dock's wave barrier while traveling at 7 knots (see figure 4). The tug broke through the wave barrier, damaging a floating dock and associated pilings, fuel system and electrical systems located behind the wave barrier. At the time, there were two, 47-foot-long Coast Guard motor lifeboats and a smaller 25-foot-long patrol boat moored to the floating dock that moved when the *Schweiger* struck the docks but were not damaged (see figure 5).

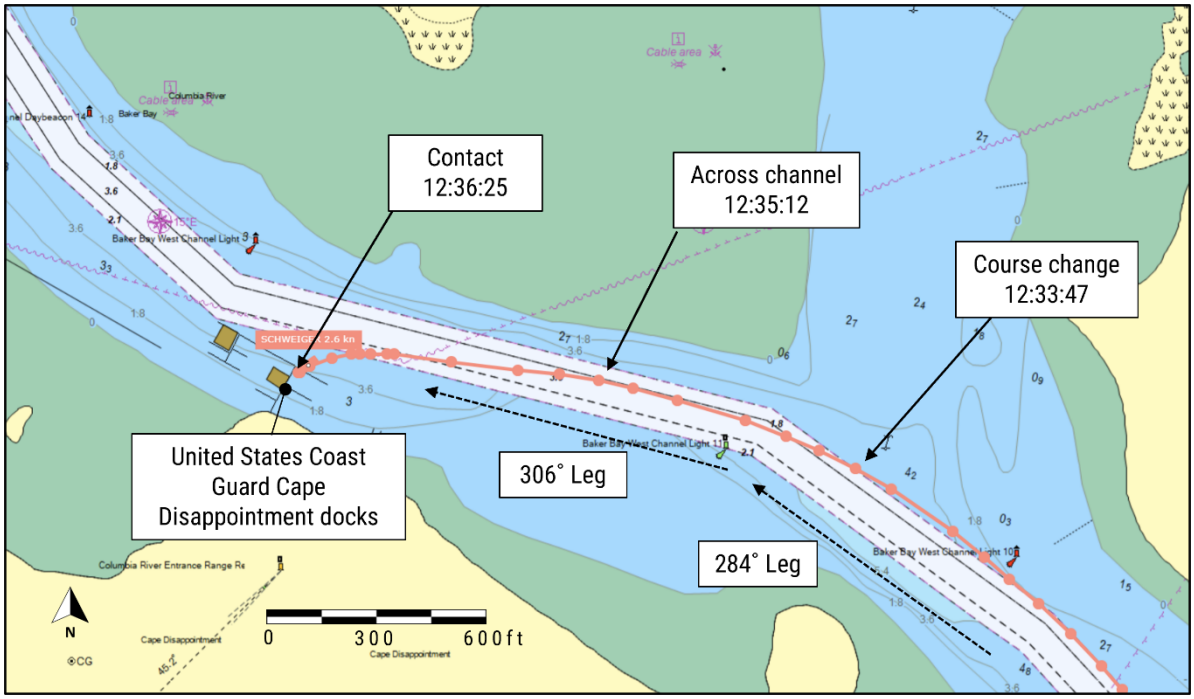

Figure 4. Trackline of the *Schweiger* as it transited the Baker Bay West Channel on September 11. (Background source: National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration electronic navigation chart US5WA02, as viewed on Made Smart AIS)

Figure 5. CCTV showing the *Schweiger* underway moments before contacting the wave barrier and floating dock. (Background source: Coast Guard)

The captain told investigators that, at some point before the contact, he "just fell asleep at the helm." He stated that the impact woke the captain and, after assessing the situation, he was able to reverse the *Schweiger* back into the Baker Bay West Channel. After establishing communication with the captain over the radio, the deckhand, who was in the galley at the time of the contact, checked the vessel for damage and assisted the captain in making notifications to their shoreside supervisor. The supervisor instructed the captain to return to the Port of Ilwaco, and then the supervisor established communications with Coast Guard station personnel before he traveled to the station to assist with damage control efforts.

The *Schweiger* arrived at its berth at the Port of Ilwaco about 1258, where Coast Guard boarding officers were already waiting on the dock for the vessel.

1.3 Additional Information

1.3.1 Damage

The *Schweiger* was undamaged. However, several components of the docking facility had damage—a 60-foot section of the wooden wave barrier was destroyed, multiple timber pilings shifted, and a concrete floating dock and metal gangway were damaged (see figure 6). Mechanical and electrical equipment located on the dock was also damaged. A diesel fuel piping system that ran from a shoreside pump room along the length of the upper pier was severed. (The fuel pipes were not pressurized at the time of the casualty.) About 20 gallons of residual fuel inside of the pipe leaked into the water and were then collected with containment booms and absorbent pads. None of the Coast Guard vessels moored at the docks at the time of the casualty were damaged.

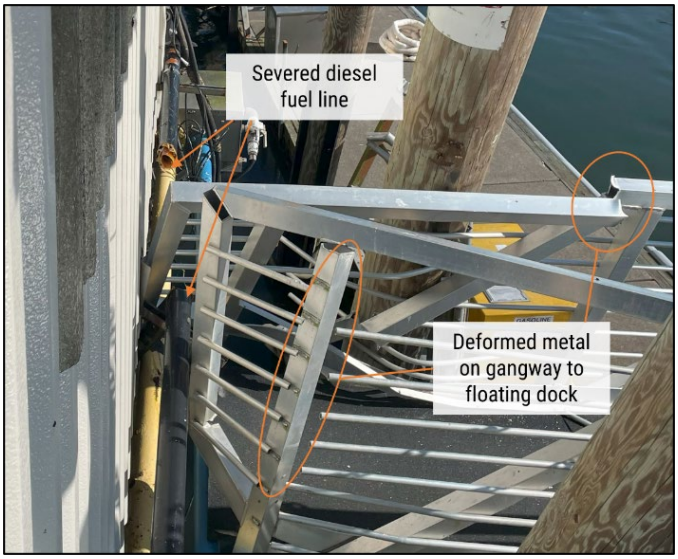

Figure 6. Docking facility's severed diesel fuel line and deformed metal gangway leading from the fixed dock bridge to the floating dock.

1.3.2 Crew Postcasualty Testing and Work/Rest History

After the contact, the captain and deckhand were tested for alcohol and other drugs, with negative results.

The captain told investigators that, on the night prior to the accident, he felt ill and experienced "a touch of dizziness." The captain stated that, to combat the symptoms, the night before the casualty, he took several 2-milligram tablets of ivermectin, an unprescribed medicine provided by his friend.[2] The captain also regularly took two medications prescribed by doctors that had been previously disclosed to the Coast Guard during his medical certification process. The captain stated he felt normal again in the morning.

On the same day as the contact, after submitting samples for the required Department of Transportation drug testing, the captain checked into an urgent care facility because he was experiencing flu-like symptoms. He was diagnosed with COVID-19 coronavirus and a partial collapse of the airspaces of the lung. He was treated with medication and released.

The captain's 96-hour work/rest history indicated he had 8 hours of sleep each night in the previous 2 nights prior to the casualty and maintained a consistent sleep-and-awake cycle. The captain worked 8 hours on September 9 (the day prior to casualty) and 12 hours on September 8, and he had not worked the previous 2 days. He stated he fell asleep immediately before the contact, but he told investigators that, while underway prior to that, he wasn't tired and that he "hadn't dozed off or anything. [He] was doing just fine."

[2] According to the US Food and Drug Administration, for humans, ivermectin tablets are approved at specific doses to treat some parasitic worms, and there are topical (on the skin) formulations for head lice and skin conditions like rosacea. (Source: https://www.fda.gov/consumers/consumer-updates/ivermectin-and-covid-19)

2 Analysis

On September 11, at 1236, the towboat *Schweiger* was transiting Baker Bay West Channel in Ilwaco, when the vessel struck the US Coast Guard Station Cape Disappointment docks after veering out of the channel.

The vessel's AIS track showed a deliberate course change from the 306˚ leg to the 284˚ leg on the red (right) side of the Baker Bay West Channel about 1233:47, indicating the captain was still alert at the time. At 1235:12, the *Schweiger* began moving to port and crossed the channel. At 1236, the rate of turn to port increased, resulting in the vessel contacting the Coast Guard docks about 30 seconds later. The captain reported that he fell asleep before the contact, which is supported by the vessel's AIS track showing the vessel moving across and then out of the channel. Therefore, the captain likely fell asleep about 1 to 3 minutes before the contact, sometime between 12:35:12 and 12:36:25 (see figure 4).

Later in the day after the contact, the captain learned that he had COVID-19 and a collapsed lung. Acute COVID-19 coronavirus infections can cause tiredness, lack of energy, headaches, and an inability to focus.[3] Suddenly falling asleep without warning has not been described as a typical feature of COVID-19, but tiredness is a common effect of COVID-19. People with acute COVID-19 also may sometimes experience syncope (which is fainting, not sleeping).[4] Therefore, as the captain was acutely symptomatic with confirmed COVID-19 at the time of the vessel's transit, it is likely he was experiencing the effects of an acute COVID-19 coronavirus infection while operating the vessel.

While the captain reported getting sufficient sleep in the 2 days before the contact, his sleep quality was likely poor, given the effects of acute COVID-19. This poor sleep quality would have resulted in increased levels of fatigue on the day of the contact and increased the likelihood of the captain falling asleep while navigating the vessel.

The captain reported taking several tablets of ivermectin, which is a prescription medication commonly used to treat parasitic infections in humans and animals. Ivermectin was proposed early in the COVID-19 pandemic as an alternative

[3] S. Spudich S and A. Nath, "Nervous system consequences of COVID-19," *Science* 2022;375(6578):267-269, doi: https://doi.org/10.1126/science.abm2052.

[4] R.F. de Freitas, S.C. Torres, F.J. Martín-Sánchez, A.V. Carbó, G. Lauria, and J.P.L. Nunes, "Syncope and COVID-19 disease - A systematic review," *Auton Neurosci* 2021; 235:102872, doi: 10.1016/j.autneu.2021.102872.

therapy for prevention and treatment of COVID-19 infections but was subsequently found to be ineffective for this purpose, with significant potential for adverse side effects.[5] Ivermectin generally carries a warning that neurotoxicity can occur with use, including alterations of consciousness (ranging from drowsiness and stupor to coma) as well as confusion and disorientation.[6] Department of Transportation postaccident testing does not test for ivermectin, so investigators could not confirm whether the medication the captain took was, in fact, ivermectin. Given his illness and the prescribed and unprescribed medication he took, it cannot be ruled out that he may have suffered a sudden medical incapacitation, which resulted in him becoming incapacitated prior to the contact.

[5] A. Wijewickrema, H. Banneheke, A. Pathmeswaran, and others, "Efficacy and safety of oral ivermectin in the treatment of mild to moderate Covid-19 patients: a multi-centre double-blind randomized controlled clinical trial," *BMC Infect Dis* 24, 719 (2024), https://doi.org/10.1186/s12879-024-09563-y.

[6] National Institutes of Health, National Library of Medicine, "Ivermectin," *DailyMed*, https://dailymed.nlm.nih.gov/dailymed/drugInfo.cfm?setid=847a1dd7-d65b-4a0e-a67d-d90392059dac.

3 Conclusions

3.1 Probable Cause

The National Transportation Safety Board determines that the probable cause of the contact of the towing vessel *Schweiger* with the US Coast Guard Cape Disappointment docks was the captain falling asleep while navigating the vessel, likely due to increased fatigue caused by an acute COVID-19 coronavirus infection.

3.2 Lessons Learned

Use of Medication While Operating Vessels

For the safety of the crew, equipment, and vessel, use of medication in conjunction with the operation of a vessel must be done with caution. Mariners should be aware of any adverse side effects of medications that impact their ability to perform their duties. Mariners should never use medications with which they are unfamiliar or for which they are not the prescribed user.

Vessel Particulars

Vessel	*Schweiger*
NTSB vessel group	Towing/Barge (Towing vessel)
Owner/operator	Advanced American Construction Inc. (Commercial)
Flag	United States
Port of registry	Portland, Oregon
Year built	1979
Official number	613398 (US)
IMO number	8851015
Classification society	N/A
Length (overall)	60.4 ft (18.4 m)
Breadth (max.)	23.0 ft (7.0 m)
Draft (casualty)	8.0 ft (2.4m)
Tonnage	136 GRT
Engine power; manufacturer	2 x 1,140 hp (850 kW); MTU diesel engines

NTSB investigators worked closely with our counterparts from **Coast Guard Sector Columbia River** throughout this investigation.