



NTSB 2017–2018
MOST WANTED LIST OF
TRANSPORTATION SAFETY IMPROVEMENTS

Eliminate Distractions



MARINE

MWL
MOST WANTED LIST



Engaging in tasks other than vessel operation can have deadly consequences.

What is the issue?

Although the highest number of transportation fatalities are seen on our highways, the detriments of visual, manual, cognitive, and auditory distractions can be seen in all modes of transportation. Vessel operators do not always have their eyes or minds on the waterway, but we know that focusing on or thinking about anything other than the task at hand impairs performance and can lead to tragic consequences. Increased use of portable electronic devices (PEDs) among commercial transportation employees has made distractions more prevalent and resulted in a heightened safety risk in vessel operations.

In heavily regulated transportation industries like marine, communicating with crew and dispatchers, checking instruments and equipment, and completing scheduled tasks may be part of normal work duties, but engaging in tasks other than vessel operation can have deadly consequences. We have investigated several marine accidents in which distraction was a cause or contributing cause. One of the most prominent accidents occurred in July 2010, when the 250-foot-long sludge barge *The Resource*, being towed alongside the 78.9-foot-long tugboat *Caribbean Sea*, collided with the anchored 33-foot-long amphibious passenger vehicle *DUKW 34* in the Delaware River in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. As a result of the collision, *DUKW 34* sank in about 55 feet of water. Two passengers were fatally injured, and 26 passengers suffered minor injuries.

We determined that the probable cause of this accident was in part the inattentiveness of the *Caribbean Sea's* mate, who was solely responsible for navigating the vessel at the time. Our investigation determined the mate failed to maintain a proper lookout because he was distracted by his personal cell phone and company laptop computer.

What can be done?

Every auxiliary task impairs our ability to process the primary task at hand. For safety-critical operations, distraction must be managed, even engineered, to ensure safe operations.

It will take a cultural change for vessel operators to understand that their safety—and the safety of their passengers and cargo—depends on disconnecting from deadly distractions. In regulated transportation, the existing rules that aim to minimize the threat of distraction must be embraced by every operator on every trip, and where distraction can be eliminated, reduced, or mitigated, regulators should act to do so.

The first step toward removing deadly distractions will be to disconnect from non mission critical information. For

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decades, the aviation mode has recognized the need for “sterile cockpit” procedures that restrict activities and conversations to the task at hand. But all modes of transportation need to rise to today’s distraction challenges. That’s why, in December 2012, we called for a driver ban of all PEDs. We have issued similar recommendations for marine.

Public education continues to be important to making operators and safety-critical personnel aware of the dangers of distraction. However, we also need strong regulation and employer policies to help reduce accidents/crashes, injuries, and fatalities caused by deadly distractions. Likewise, we must continue to build our technical understanding of auxiliary task distraction in regulated transportation, especially with regard to new vehicle technologies that require real-time operator attention. Advances in these areas will support regulatory efforts and lead us toward a cultural norm that encourages and supports operators remaining disconnected from deadly distractions. ■



The NTSB Most Wanted List highlights safety issues identified from the NTSB’s accident investigations to increase awareness about the issues and promote recommended safety solutions.

The NTSB is an independent federal agency charged by Congress with investigating every civil aviation accident in the United States and significant accidents in other modes of transportation – railroad, highway, marine and pipeline. The NTSB determines the probable cause of the accidents and issues safety recommendations aimed at preventing future accidents. In addition, the NTSB carries out special studies concerning transportation safety and coordinates the resources of the federal government and other organizations to provide assistance to victims and their family members impacted by major transportation disasters.

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Date	Location	Accident ID
July 7, 2010	Philadelphia, PA	DCA10MM025

*For detailed accident reports visit www.nts.gov

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Critical changes needed to reduce transportation accidents and save lives.

