



MARITIME SAFETY/SECURITY
INFORMATION BULLETIN

10 September 2008

Coast Guard Sector Lake Michigan
2420 S. Lincoln Memorial Drive
Milwaukee, WI, 53207



Case Study Report: Uninspected Passenger Vessel

Coast Guard Sector Lake Michigan is providing the case study report on the sinking of an Uninspected Passenger Vessel (UPV) that operated charter fishing trips out of Waukegan Harbor, Waukegan, IL. The vessel sunk on 30 May 2008 due to vessel watertight integrity and weather related factors. There were six passengers and one Captain on board all rescued that day.

Coast Guard Sector Lake Michigan is fully committed to assisting all the Maritime Community, by passing this information on as lessons learned. Please send any comments or concerns in writing to Coast Guard Sector Lake Michigan, 2420 S. Lincoln Memorial Drive, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, 53207, attn: Prevention Department Case Report MSIB or fax to 414-747-7890.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "K. L. Bannan".

K. L. Bannan
Lieutenant Commander, U. S. Coast Guard
Assistant Chief Prevention Department

Case Study report - 30MAY2008

A charter fishing trip was scheduled for 1000, 30 May 2008. The vessel was thirty six feet long and operated out of Waukegan Harbor, IL. The voyage plan was to depart Waukegan Harbor on an easterly course for approx. 2 nautical miles, then proceed south at trolling speed for the remainder of the fishing. Six passengers and one vessel Captain were on board. The Captain had a valid Coast Guard Master's license.

Prior to departure the Captain checked the morning weather report. The projected weather reports at the time were a small craft advisory until 1800; showers/thunderstorms in the morning with south winds 15-20 kts becoming southwest 15-25 kts in the late morning and afternoon. Sea state was predicted to be one foot, increasing to 2-4 feet. Showers/Thunderstorms were expected for the morning and evening, it was the understanding of the Captain and passengers that the scheduled time of their voyage would fall in a window of time not being affected by the showers/thunderstorms. It was mutually agreed upon by the passengers and the Captain that the charter would continue as planned.

The charter got underway at 1000 due east out of Waukegan Harbor. A safety orientation was not conducted prior to getting underway. Initially the reported sea state was around 10-15 knot winds, and 1-3 foot seas. After an hour of being underway one passenger became seasick and went below to the restroom. She reported that while in the restroom a significant amount of water was splashing on her from an open port-hole above her head. By 1120 the passengers and Captain begin noticing a significant increase in the weather and sea state. The vessel was approximately two nautical miles east of Waukegan Harbor and was preparing to head south when the drastic change in weather was experienced. Between 1120 and 1130 the vessel and passengers experienced a change in winds and sea state from 10-20 knot winds 2-4 foot seas, to 40-55 knot winds and 5-7 foot seas. At this point the Captain cancelled the remainder of the voyage and began to make preparations to head back into the harbor.

The Captain first began reeling in and securing all the fishing lines. There were twelve lines and this operation took approximately 10-15 minutes. In this time the weather and sea state continued to grow. The winds had now increased to 55-75 knots and the seas were 10-15 feet. The seasick passenger had taken another trip to the restroom and noticed much more water coming into the porthole just above the toilet. Within a few more moments the seasick passenger witnessed a vast increase in the water level within the cabin below. The passenger was sitting on the steps leading down into the cabin and quickly saw water getting higher forcing her to move off of the steps. After the lines were secured and the Captain was back on the helm a large wave struck the port side of the vessel breaking the front window. Immediately after this occurrence the Captain called the US Coast Guard and transmitted a MAYDAY with the current position, personnel on board, and current vessel status. Moments after the mayday transmission, another large wave struck and the starboard side of the front window failed. While attempting to maneuver the vessel, the Captain noticed that the anchor hatch on the

bow of the vessel had opened and was exposing the anchor locker to the elements. There was a small drainage area in the anchor locker which led into the bilge system. The Captain put his PFD on and confirmed all the passengers had theirs on as well. The stern of the vessel began taking on water rapidly. One passenger attempted to bail out water with a bucket with little success. The passengers and Captain started making preparations to abandon the vessel.

The passengers began grabbing gear that would help them stay afloat in the water (i.e. emptying out the cooler, collecting seat cushions, wood-panel used for hanging the fish). The Captain went below to secure the doors so as salvage of personal belongings would be possible. Upon going below, the Captain noticed a constant flow of water coming into the cabin from the air-conditioning unit located below his bed in the bow area of the vessel. As soon as the stern submerged a few passengers (including the Captain) got sucked back into the cabin underneath the canopy and began to go down with the vessel.

One passenger swam up and ran into the overhead of the canopy and followed that out the aft door and swam to the water surface. Another passenger was stuck behind a cooler that was trapped under the canopy while the vessel was sinking. The passenger was able to get out of the aft door of the canopy, after-which she swam approximately eight feet up before getting to the surface of the water. The Captain could not get to the aft door and so proceeded to try and exit the vessel through one of the broken front windows. However, the Captain's PFD got caught on part of the window frame while trying to exit and he could not get out. In his final attempt to break free the Captain was able to get loose from the window and swam an estimated sixteen feet up before reaching the water's surface. Five of the passengers were rescued and transported via CG H65 while the Captain and one passenger were rescued by a Coast Guard small boat crew. All were taken to medical facilities, treated for hypothermia, and released later that evening.

The weather system that had such an impact on this voyage is a phenomenon called a wake-low. It is a system of very strong winds and devastating potential that is caused when a strong thunderstorm system breaks apart inexplicably leaving an unstable low pressure system. The low pressure within the storm system still exists and causes a type of vacuum effect which generates extremely large winds and can often be the opening to a tornado. The entire system is formed and dissipates within 1-2 hours.

The National Weather Service (NWS) regularly broadcasts weather updates on the VHF-FM frequency 162.55MHz. Specifically, the NWS broadcasts special marine warnings over that frequency. At 1038 on 30May08 the NWS broadcasted 55 kts winds were reported at the local airport and that increased wind gusts were being experienced in an area of weakened showers and thunderstorms. These strong wind gusts were expected to overspread across southern Lake Michigan through 1300. Mariners can expect gusty winds and high waves. Boaters should seek safe harbor immediately.