

Safety Clicks

Learning from
others' mistakes

Volume 22

A TDI-Brooks Publication

October 1, 2017

Bad Things Come in Threes...

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There is an old saying that bad things come in threes— deaths, natural disasters, bad luck, etc. While there is no scientific evidence to support this, we do know from accident investigations that accidents and major disasters rarely have a single cause.

Some events are sequential—one causing the next. In the Great East Japan Earthquake in March 2011, an earthquake caused a tsunami, which destroyed the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant, which continues to leak radioactive waste into the Pacific Ocean.

In others, unrelated events or conditions occur at the same time, compounding the impact of the event and making it more difficult to respond.



Elementary school students walk near a Geiger counter. The school is 13 miles from the Fukushima nuclear power plant.



As populations increase and concentrate in urban locations, community disaster planning teams are recognizing that compound incidents are more likely and more difficult to deal with than ever before.

In the following story, a perfect storm of crisis—engine failure, loss of steering, collision, hull breach and fire engulfing the entire vessel, could have lead to a disaster of national proportions in the Houston Ship Channel. Two experienced pilots kept their heads and risked their lives to prevent that from happening.

The way we prepare for emergencies at sea is drills. The next time you conduct a drill, consider how your crew would respond to a compound disaster. What are the likely scenarios? What can you do to prepare now?



Apophenia-
The tendency of a person to perceive patterns in random events and assign meaning to them.

"The need to recognize and understand the possible and probable occurrence of multiple disaster events in one location and at about the same time, and how one event might precipitate another...is great and growing."
[United Nations Office for Disaster Risk reduction report](#)

TOP Safety Card Hits
(Fleetwide last month)

Housekeeping 5
Safety Attitude 5
Communications 5

Two Houston Ship Pilots to Receive IMO's 'Exceptional Bravery at Sea' Award

The International Maritime Organization has awarded the 2017 IMO Award for Exceptional Bravery at Sea to two Houston ship pilots for their role in preventing a major disaster when the ship they were piloting broke down and burst into flames in the Houston Ship Channel.

The Award for Exceptional Bravery at Sea is the IMO's highest honor for bravery at sea.

The two pilots – Captains Michael McGee and Michael Phillips – are the first harbor pilots ever to be nominated and named recipients of the award.

The incident occurred shortly after midnight on September 6, 2016, when Captain McGee and Captain Phillips were piloting the 247-meter MT Aframax River, unladen at the time, in the Houston Ship Channel. The size of the tanker meant it required two pilots.



As McGee was conning the vessel during undocking, the ship experienced sudden engine failure and struck two mooring dolphins. As a result of the contact, a port fuel tank was ruptured and diesel fuel spilled into the water, which quickly ignited. Within moments, the ship was engulfed in flames – reaching up to 60 to 90 meters high at times. The raging inferno quickly spread across the channel, threatening other tank ships and nearby waterfront facilities, and enveloped the area in thick toxic smoke.

Despite the danger, and at great risk to their own lives, both pilots remained at their stations on the bridge of the ship. Captain McGee managed to maneuver the stricken and blazing vessel away from surrounding ships and facilities. Meanwhile, Captain Phillips coordinated communications and firefighting efforts with the United States Coast Guard and numerous local fireboats. Captain Phillips rushed to grab a fire extinguisher and put out a fire raging on the port bridge wing.

As the water and the vessel were engulfed with flames and disaster seemingly imminent,

Phillips turned to McGee and warned, “We are going to die.”

The inferno was extinguished after about 90 minutes, leaving both pilots exhausted and suffering minor burns – but alive. Captain McGee, using tugs, was then able to bring the damaged tanker safely to a mooring facility.

In the end, and as a result of their courageous actions, no lives were lost, serious damage to pier structures and petro-chemical facilities was prevented, and a major marine pollution incident was avoided.

