



**Homeland  
Security**

*U.S. COAST GUARD*

*Sector Upper*

*Mississippi River*



## **Marine Safety Information Bulletin #03-09**

*This bulletin is used purely for informational purposes to assist the maritime community within the Sector Upper Mississippi River Area of Responsibility. Its purpose is to advise relevant parties of emerging information & situations that may impact our Marine Transportation System as well as facilitates cooperation among the involved parties regarding actions that we may be taking and/or that you may need to employ in the interest of safety/security.*

### **Reducing Downstreaming Incidents on the Western Rivers**

**April 3rd, 2009**

On March 11, 2009, a harbor tug working on the Mississippi River was pinned to the box end of a moored barge after attempting a *downstreaming* maneuver in high water conditions. The vessel's ability to stay afloat was quickly defeated by the river and the tug was swept below the barge. Thankfully, none of the crew were seriously injured in the incident despite the startling statistics relating to *downstreaming* fatalities.

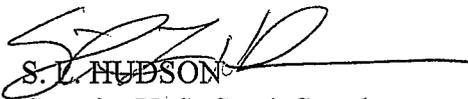
This incident is not isolated; the Coast Guard in conjunction with the AWO documented numerous *downstreaming* incidents prior to 1997. The study found that crews involved in *downstreaming* casualties have a high probability of not surviving the event. I am very concerned about the use of the *downstreaming* maneuvers in high water conditions, especially with many of the less experienced pilots that are taking the helm these days.

While any death is a serious matter, the ratio of deaths to Marine Casualties has steadily declined in recent years, however, when a *downstreaming* casualty happens, the ratio of deaths to survivability is staggering. In order to reduce the likelihood of future incidents we must first look at historical events. The AWO and USCG completed a study on *downstreaming* casualties identified between 1992 and early 1997. During that period 284 towboats sank on inland waters, eleven of those vessels sank as a result of *downstreaming* incidents. While the majority of Marine Casualties do not result in death, the data from 1997 to 1982 showed that 12 deaths occurred on just six tug sinkings. The speed of the sinkings resulted in the loss of the entire crew in two of those casualties. A Quality Action Team (QAT) composed of Coast Guard, American Waterways Operators (AWO) and industry representatives completed a study of *downstreaming* casualties in 1999. Subsequent to the study, they co-authored a report identifying the hazards and potential contributing factors in *downstreaming* casualties "Reducing Downstreaming Incidents Report of the Quality Action Team."

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In response to the incident on March 11, 2009, and the projected flooding that will result in high water conditions on the Illinois and Upper Mississippi Rivers, it is important that we re-focus on the hazards of downstreaming and resources necessary to mitigate *downstreaming* casualties. I encourage operators upon the Western Rivers to obtain the report from the AWO on the AWO web-site at [www.americanwaterways.com](http://www.americanwaterways.com) , or on Sector Upper Mississippi's web-page at <http://www.uscg.mil/d8/sectUMR/> . Companies should circulate the report to operators and company dispatchers as well as hold open discussions about the dangers of *downstreaming*. In addition, the report's Quality Action Team provided a prudent recommendation for companies to develop a written policy and/or plan outlining operating procedures with regard to *downstreaming*. I strongly support this recommendation. Finally, training material was developed by the AWO in the form of the video "Downstreaming: Better Safe than Sorry" which can be obtained by contacting Mr. Bob Clinton at (703) 841-9300, Ext. 253. The video is available to AWO and NON-AWO members.

Any questions regarding this information bulletin may be addressed to the Prevention Department, Sector UMR at (314) 539-3091 ext. 3501.

  
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Captain of the Port