



STATE OF WASHINGTON

BOARD OF PILOTAGE COMMISSIONERS

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During an early morning departure from Tacoma in windy conditions, a close quarters situation developed in Commencement Bay between a containership and a tug pushing a spoils barge.

The containership had a person on board who needed to disembark to a launch in Commencement Bay after underway tests.

When the containership had departed the terminal and was in Commencement Bay, the pilot released the assist tugs. He also called VTS (Puget Sound Vessel Traffic Service) and said he would be "lingering" in the bay waiting to disembark the technician.

With winds gusting to 40 knots out of the southwest it became apparent to the pilot he would not be able to drift in the bay and maintain position as he had intended. Instead he decided to initiate a round turn maneuver. This change of plan was not passed on to VTS or to other local traffic at this time. VTS reported to the tug the containership was "sitting out there."

The pilot on the containership made contact with the tug via VHF and informed it the ship was making a round turn. By this time the containership was well into the turning maneuver, with the normal turning circle of the containership elongated due to the high winds. Even though the tug with the spoils barge and containership were in radio communication, a close quarters situation developed between them because of the limited maneuverability of the ship while making the round turn.

In reviewing the MSO Report submitted by the pilot it was determined by the Board that two key actions on the part of the pilot likely contributed to the close quarters situation.

The pilot was not sufficiently clear in his communications with VTS as to his initial intentions by use of the word "lingering." When circumstances caused a change of plan, this was not communicated to VTS or other traffic in a timely manner.

The pilot released both assist tugs prior to fully assessing the effect of the wind upon the containership while waiting for the person on board to depart. This required the ship to take action by maneuvering into a round turn which created the close quarters situation.

Lessons Learned from this Event:

1. **It is important to accurately describe your intentions in communications with VTS and other vessels.** VTS was not aware of the intentions of the containership because of the imprecise language and passed inaccurate and/or incomplete information to the tug with the spoils barge.
2. **Pilots required to maneuver in a harbor where high wind conditions exist, may find it prudent to obtain or retain tug assistance.** Had the containership retained the assistance of at least one of its tugs, the ship would likely have been able to maintain its heading and position in the bay during the adverse winds, and likely would have avoided making the round turn that put the ship into a close quarters situation.