



## Report: Coast Guard shares blame in spill

By [Amy McCullough](#) - Staff writer  
Posted : Thursday Feb 19, 2009 15:09:44 EST

The Coast Guard failed to provide “adequate” oversight of the freighter Cosco Busan’s pilot before it rammed into the San Francisco Bay Bridge and spilled 53,000 gallons of oil into the Bay in November 2007. Consequently, the service is partially responsible for the collision, according to a new report released Thursday from the National Transportation Safety Board.

“Given the pilot’s medical condition, the Coast Guard should have revoked [the pilot’s] license, but they didn’t; the pilot should have made the effort to provide a meaningful pre-departure briefing to the master, but he didn’t; and the master should have taken a more active role in ensuring the safety of his ship, but he didn’t,” acting NTSB Chairman Mark Rosenker said in a statement. “There is a lack of competence in so many areas that this accident seemed almost inevitable.”

The collision cost more than \$70 million for the environmental cleanup, as well as about \$2 million in damages to the ship, and \$1.5 million in damages to the bridge. The pilot was on a “half-dozen impairing prescription medications” at the time of the incident, according to a summary of the report. The full report has not yet been released.

Coast Guard spokeswoman Lt. Nadine Santiago said the service is reviewing the report and is open to any suggestions but can not discuss details until its own investigation is released. That release is slated for Monday.

According to documents submitted by the Coast Guard to NTSB for review, Coast Guardsmen boarded the Cosco Busan six times between Feb. 2, 2002, and July 17, 2007, for such things as port state control exams, ballast water exams, International Ship and Port Facility Security Code exams and security boardings.

During these boardings, it was determined that all crew members “met the minimum requirements of the International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping for Seafarers.”

Of the safety board’s eight recommendations, five are directed at the Coast Guard and its 12 Vessel Traffic Centers that provide safety information to mariners.

The board asks:

- That the International Maritime Organization address the language and cultural differences in its bridge resource management curricula.
- The service revises its policies to ensure that radio communications not only identify the pilot but also the vessel.
- Requires mariners to report significant changes in their health or medications used.
- Ensure that pilot oversight programs share information on relevant performance and safety data with each other.
- Asks for clearer guidance on when VTS should “direct or control vessel movement.”

The NTSB report follows an internal report by the inspector general of the Department of Homeland Security released in May 2008 that said the Coast Guard’s maritime safety inspection program is staffed by unqualified personnel

who don't follow proper procedures and mismanage their backlog of thousands of unfinished investigations.

In the past, members of the House Transportation subcommittee on the Coast Guard and maritime transportation as well as the chairman of the full committee have lambasted the service for failing to improve its oversight despite reports with similar findings that date as far back as 1981.

The congressmen also have suggested that the service's maritime oversight powers should be re-examined and possibly even transferred to a new agency.

A new memorandum of understanding was signed between the Coast Guard and NTSB following the May hearing that requires both agencies to "immediately notify the other of all information received regarding the casualty, and both agencies will quickly coordinate the appropriate investigative response."