



National Transportation Safety Board

Marine Accident Brief

Collision of Sand Barge *Weeks 207*, Pushed by Tugboat *Seeley*, with Sailboat *Sea Jay*

Accident type	Collision	No. DCA18FM039
Vessel names	Barge <i>Weeks 207</i> , tugboat <i>Seeley</i> , and sailboat <i>Sea Jay</i>	
Location	West Branch Stamford Harbor, Stamford, Connecticut 41°02.36' N, 073°032.72' W	
Date	September 17, 2018	
Time	0826 eastern daylight time (coordinated universal time – 4 hours)	
Injuries	None	
Property damage	\$300,000 est.	
Environmental damage	Oil sheen observed	
Weather	Visibility 5 miles, clear, winds southeast at 5 knots, seas calm, ebbing tidal current at 0.4 knots, air temperature 68°F, morning twilight 0609, sunrise 0637	
Waterway information	The 1-mile-long West Branch of Stamford Harbor. ¹ The West Branch federal channel is 15 feet deep and 125 feet wide. The West Branch is lined with marinas and leads into a 15-foot-deep, 380-foot-wide maneuvering basin at the mouth of the Rippowam River.	

On September 17, 2018, about 0826 local time, the tugboat *Seeley* with a crew of five was upbound on the West Branch of Stamford Harbor, Connecticut, pushing two sand barges, when the lead barge struck the stern of the moored sailboat *Sea Jay* during a tripping maneuver. The *Seeley* continued with both barges to its destination and the *Sea Jay* remained afloat at its mooring. No injuries were reported. Minor oil pollution originated from the *Sea Jay*; damage to the sailboat amounted to \$300,000.



Left, tugboat *Seeley* before the accident. (Source: Weeks Marine) Right, sailboat *Sea Jay* anchored before the accident. (Source: Sea Jay)

¹ All miles in this report are nautical miles (1.15 statute miles).

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Map of the accident area, with the site of the collision overlaid by a red triangle. (Background by Google Maps)

Background

The 77-foot-long *Seeley* was a twin-propeller towing vessel, powered by two diesel engines producing a combined 1,800 horsepower. The vessel was built in 1981 and at the time of the accident owned and operated by Weeks Marine Incorporated and homeported in New York. The two sand barges that the *Seeley* was towing, *Weeks 207* and *Weeks 213*, were also owned by Weeks Marine, each measuring 150 feet long, 40 feet wide, and 12 feet deep. The total length of the tow, including the *Seeley*, was 377 feet. Its crew consisted of a captain, a licensed mate, a deck engineer, and two deckhands.

The *Sea Jay*, a recreational catamaran sailing vessel built in 2017 in South Africa, measured 50 feet in length with a beam of 26 feet. It had been moored at Hinckley Marina, located on the west side of the navigation channel of the West Branch, since September 13, four days before the accident. No one was on board the *Sea Jay* at the time of the collision.

Accident Events

At 0755, the *Seeley* picked up the two loaded sand barges from their anchored location at the Stamford Mooring for delivery to O&G Industries, only 1.3 miles away, on the West Branch of Stamford Harbor. Within 21 minutes of leaving the mooring, the tow, traveling at just over 3 knots, entered the West Branch of Stamford Harbor. Although the West Branch measures approximately 600 feet between its opposite shores, marina piers and docks lining both sides narrow the waterway to as little as 130 feet.

The mate piloting the tow had transported many barges to and from O&G Industries in the West Branch while working for Weeks Marine and also for a previous employer. In fact, less than 2 hours before picking up the two sand barges, he had completed a round trip to the facility to retrieve an empty barge. O&G Industries preferred that barges be docked and unloaded one abreast of the other (side by side). During the transport of *Weeks 207* and *Weeks 213*, the mate decided to employ what is called a tripping maneuver by having the deckhands release tow wires on one side between the two barges, which allows the lead barge to swing to one side until it comes alongside the barge behind it as the tow continues to move ahead. He often employed this maneuver when bringing barges into the West Branch for delivery to O&G Industries. He decided to use this maneuver after assessing the location of vessels and docks and the favorable weather conditions for that day. An advantage of maneuvering with the two barges alongside one another was saving the time it would take to dock one barge at a time. In the towing industry, it is expected that the mate would perform all docking, undocking, and other maneuvers without the captain's assistance.

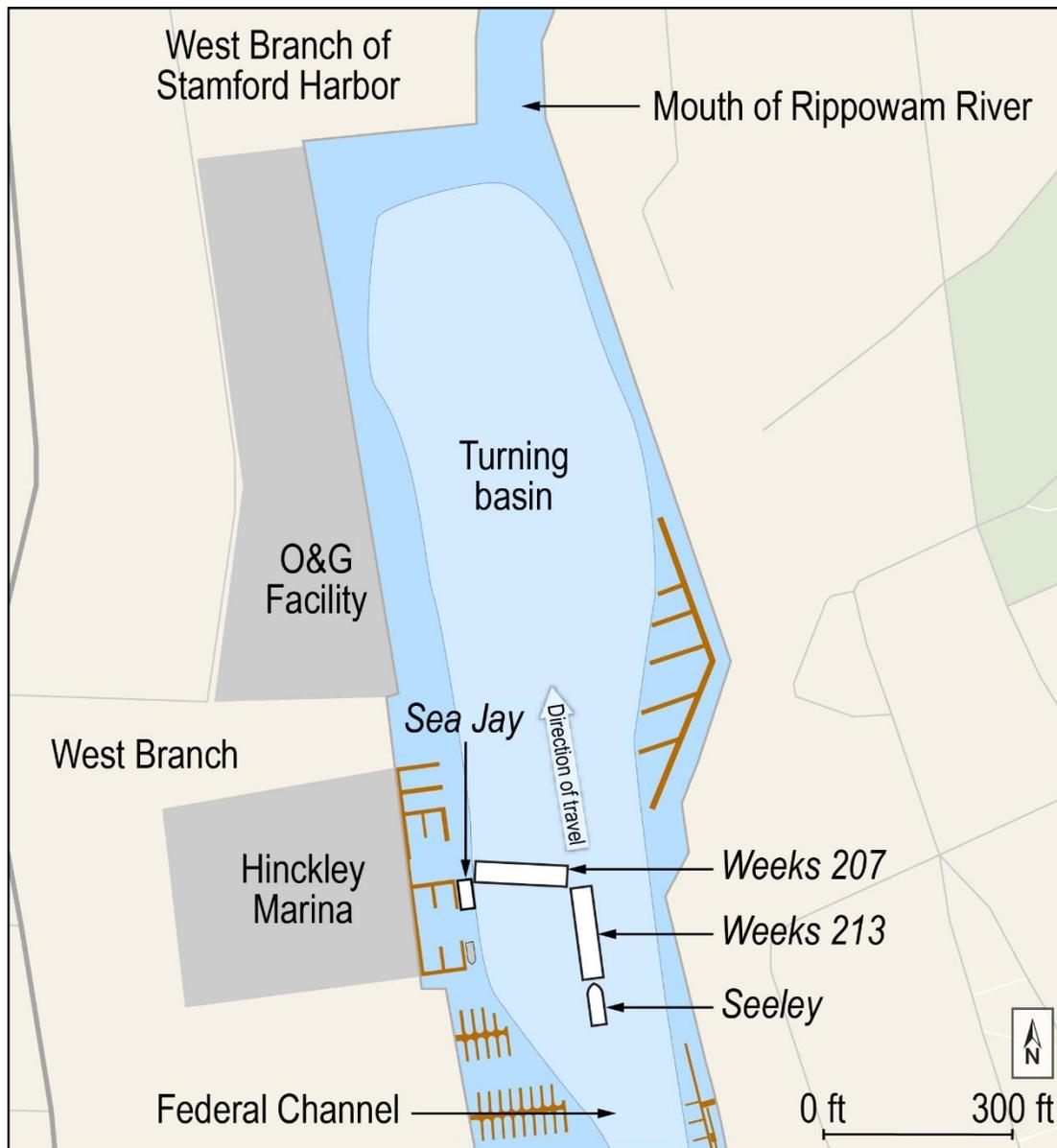


Catamaran *Sea Jay*, the vessel with a red main sail cover, seen docked at the end of Hinckley pier after the accident. (Source: US Coast Guard)

When the tow was about 750 feet from the terminal and just as the bow of the lead barge entered a section of the branch where the width between docks on each side increased from 150 to

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190 feet, the mate ordered the deck engineer and the deckhand to let go the starboard lines connecting the two barges to each other. As the tugboat and *Weeks 213* slowly moved forward, *Weeks 207*—which was still connected to *Weeks 213* on the port side—slowly swung to port.



Rendition showing the approximate position of barge *Weeks 207*, pushed by tugboat *Seeley*, striking sailboat *Sea Jay*. (Background by Google Maps)

After letting go the lines, the deck engineer went to the port side of *Weeks 213* and provided the mate with distances between the swinging *Weeks 207* and the vessels and piers on the port side of the tow, including the sailboat *Sea Jay*, which was the outermost vessel moored at Hinckley Marina, now directly off the tow's port side. The deckhand went to the port stern of *Weeks 213* so that he could secure *Weeks 207* to *Weeks 213* once the barge had completed its 180-degree swing-around.

At 0835, less than 2 minutes after the mate ordered letting go the lines and as the tow moved toward the terminal at a speed of just over 1 knot, the port bow of *Weeks 207* swung to port, striking

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the port side of the *Sea Jay* at its stern and damaging the fiberglass hull. The impact pressed the *Sea Jay* against the dock on the sailboat's starboard side and causing movement of the floating pier, its finger piers, and four vessels moored to the dock. As the *Seeley* continued moving ahead, the barge came away from the *Sea Jay* and continued swinging to port.



Surveillance footage of (top) *Seeley* with *Weeks 213* and the separated *Weeks 207* angled and moving toward the *Sea Jay* (circled) at 0825:19. Inset: Port forward corner of *Weeks 207* at the moment it falls away from the *Sea Jay*. (Source: US Coast Guard)

After *Weeks 207* struck the *Sea Jay*, the tripping maneuver continued until the barges were brought together. The *Seeley* mate told investigators that because the tow was still in the navigable channel, he did not want to obstruct other vessel traffic and so he continued with both barges to the terminal and moored them. Employees from Hinckley Marina scrambled to the *Sea Jay* to assess the damage. The collision damaged an oil line on the *Sea Jay*, which spilled oil into the bilge. This oil mixed with water and was pumped overboard by one of the *Sea Jay*'s small automatic bilge pumps. Responders noted the sheen and contained the spill with absorbent boom; they subsequently removed the oil using absorbent pads. The *Sea Jay* was towed that same day to a boat yard for repair of its port hull and deck. The dock and *Weeks 207* were undamaged in the accident.

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From left: crack in the fiberglass on the port side of the *Sea Jay*'s port catamaran hull; cracks in the fiberglass in way of steps and engine compartment at stern of port hull. (Source: US Coast Guard)



Additional Information

The Hinckley Marina and its piers were relatively new additions to the West Branch (the last tenant of the property was a boat yard without piers). The US Army Corps of Engineers authorized the dock construction along the 400 feet of marina property in 2012. The marina began operating in September 2017 and then began building its five piers less than 1 year before the accident. The distance from the boundary of the federal navigation channel in the West Branch to the end of the pier where the *Sea Jay* was moored measured 50 feet.

Weeks Marine carried out an accident investigation as called for in its towing safety management system (TSMS). The investigation concluded that the mate “made a poor choice in tripping the barge around directly off the Hinckley Marina, as there was plenty of room ahead in the turning basin to conduct this maneuver.” The company investigator recommended that tugboats no longer trip barges around in narrow channels; the investigator also met with the *Seeley* crew to review and discuss the accident. As a result of the TSMS accident investigation and the meeting with the crew, Weeks Marine took corrective action and implemented a new policy for Stamford Harbor, limiting the company’s towing vessels to one barge when entering or leaving the West and East Branch. In addition, the mate was disciplined with a warning for completing a maneuver in close quarters that resulted in striking a docked sailboat.

Analysis

Although the mate had attempted and successfully completed this maneuver before, the relatively narrow channel compared to the width of the two barges and the nearby piers and private vessels moored on either side made conducting a tripping maneuver in this location risky. The mate did use a formal Job Safety Analysis that addressed the entire voyage from Perth Amboy, New Jersey, to Stamford. However, with regard to potential hazards associated with operating in the West Branch, the analysis stated only: “Watch for dragging anchors and traffic.” The analysis did not address the piers and moored vessels in the West Branch. The mate was likely aware of the *Sea Jay* being moored at the pier on the west side of the river because the sailboat was clearly visible and

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also had been there during his previous transit to O&G Industries less than 2 hours earlier. As a catamaran with two hulls, its beam was nearly twice the width of a conventional (single) hull vessel of similar length. However, the mate said he did not account for the wider beam of the catamaran.

Probable Cause

The National Transportation Safety Board determines that the probable cause of the collision of sand barge *Weeks 207*, pushed by tugboat *Seeley*, with sailboat *Sea Jay* was the *Seeley* mate's decision to perform a tripping maneuver in a narrow channel near surrounding piers and docked vessels, despite the availability of an appropriate turning basin only about a tow length ahead.

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Vessel Particulars

Vessels	<i>Seeley</i>	<i>Sea Jay</i>	<i>Weeks 207</i>
Owner/operator	Weeks Marine Inc/Vane Line Bunkering Inc	Ridgmont Enterprises LLC	Weeks Marine
Port of registry	New York, New York	St. Johns, US Virgin Islands	New York, New York
Flag	United States	United States	United States
Type	Towing vessel	Recreational	Freight barge
Year built	1981	2017	2017
Official number (US)	643710	1276332	1273724
IMO number	8987113	Not applicable	Not applicable
Classification society	Not applicable	Not applicable	Not applicable
Construction	Steel	FRP (fiberglass)	Steel
Length	77 ft (23.5 m)	50 ft (15.2 m)	150 ft (45.7 m)
Draft	10 ft (3 m)	4 ft (1.2 m)	8 ft (2.4 m)
Beam/width	26 ft (7.9 m)	26 ft (7.9 m)	40 ft (12.2 m)
Tonnage	197 gross tons	24 gross tons	604 gross tons
Engine power; manufacturer	2 x 900 hp (671 kW); Cummins KTA 38 diesel engines	2 x 44.4 hp (33.1 kW); Yenmar 4JH45 diesel engines	Not applicable
Persons on board	5	0	0

NTSB investigators worked closely with our counterparts from Coast Guard Sector Long Island Sound, Connecticut, throughout this investigation.

For more details about this accident, visit www.nts.gov and search for NTSB accident ID DCA18FM039.

Issued: November 7, 2019

The NTSB has authority to investigate and establish the probable cause of any major marine casualty or any marine casualty involving both public and nonpublic vessels under Title 49 *United States Code*, Section 1131(b)(1). This report is based on factual information either gathered by NTSB investigators or provided by the Coast Guard from its informal investigation of the accident.

The NTSB does not assign fault or blame for a marine casualty; rather, as specified by NTSB regulation, “[NTSB] investigations are fact-finding proceedings with no formal issues and no adverse parties . . . and are not conducted for the purpose of determining the rights or liabilities of any person.” Title 49 *Code of Federal Regulations*, Section 831.4.

Assignment of fault or legal liability is not relevant to the NTSB’s statutory mission to improve transportation safety by conducting investigations and issuing safety recommendations. In addition, statutory language prohibits the admission into evidence or use of any part of an NTSB report related to an accident in a civil action for damages resulting from a matter mentioned in the report. Title 49 *United States Code*, Section 1154(b).