



National Transportation Safety Board

Washington, D.C. 20594
Office of Marine Safety

Interview Summary – DCA15FM035

Interview of: [REDACTED] - Hotel Director (HD) and [REDACTED] - Guest Services Manager (GSM)

Date/Time: September 12, 2015 from 1704 to 1823

Location: On board Carnival Liberty, St Thomas USVI

Interviewed by: [REDACTED] - USCG, [REDACTED] — Fowler Rodriguez, [REDACTED] - NTSB, [REDACTED] – NTSB IIC, [REDACTED] – USCG, [REDACTED] – Carnival Corporation

Case: Carnival Liberty engine room fire, September 7, 2015

[REDACTED] is the HD on the Carnival Liberty and during an emergency she is the muster control leader. She is responsible for the overall evacuation for the guests on board and her station is on deck 3 in the main lobby. She reports to the command and control on the bridge. She has a checklist available to her with the names and phone numbers of key persons she has to communicate with for reporting purposes.

The GSM is in charge of the guest and crew evacuation in case the hotel manager is not able to fulfill her duties. They account for passengers and crew. They muster on deck 3 by the lobby bar.

When asked how they receive information from people who have to report to them, it was stated that this is communicated by phone or radio and then they record the evacuation progress using the checklist. They also have the evacuation zone commander with them together with the special needs team. The HD commented having the special needs team was excellent given the situation they had. The HD has direct contact with the bridge by radio and phone.

On the day of the accident, the HD was near her office when she heard the 1st stage response announcement. Since she went to her office and grabbed her lifejacket, equipment, radio and checklists and reported to the command and control that she was in position. The crew alert then followed and that is when they started the accountability program where they accounted that all teams were in position. They get this information from the main vertical zone supervisors and guest muster station leaders. They report to her when they and their team members are in position. They kept command and control informed. They started recording the missing crew. After that the general emergency signal sounded and they then moved into the evacuation of the guests. She remembered there being announcements that were made for guests to evacuate the ship.

The evacuation zone commander commenced with evacuating guest and crew cabins and once confirmed, the HD reported to the command and control that the ship was evacuated. Any other guests in the lobby were special needs guests so they needed extra assistance to get off. The family members wanted to remain with them which was allowed. The special needs team, across the lobby helped get them off the ship. They then reported when everyone was off to

command and control. After that they proceeded with the crew evacuation leaving only the persons who are on first response on board. All muster station supervisors and zone leaders went last. The containment team remained on board as well. They later heard there was one male guest found on the lido deck and that person was escorted off.

They received notification that there were 541 guests on board from A-Pass but that was not accurate since the guests were not punching out during the evacuation. Only the guests that were going ashore before the general alarm were punching out. Both the HD and GSM remember 541 guests remaining on board. They printed the passenger lists based on the 541 people on board since they needed to know and cross reference who was on the list and who was on the pier. They printed 8 copies. They did the same for the crew too. They then had to figure out how they were going to do it. They wanted to make sure the 541 listed on board were checked on the pier. They used muster station 3 and 4 teams plus the special needs team to go down the list and check off people they physically see.

The lists of the guests were printed to be available to the teams on the pier so they could check who was there and not to get them mixed up with the people who were coming back to the ship. They had to manually check to see which guest is on the pier. That is what they planned to do.

The HD and GSM confirmed there was a passenger muster drill before departure from San Juan. Embarkation station and muster stations on the Carnival Liberty are the same which is at the lifeboats. During a drill, like the one they did the night before in San Juan, the crew will physically check the cabins. Once they get the confirmation that the sections are clear, they take account of guests and the muster stations and once all accounted for they do a lifejacket demonstration. This also includes the special needs guests who are in a different area.

On the day of the accident, they directed them straight off the ship. The guests did not go to their muster stations. Everyone left the ship from the gangways, and they had to print the lists to account for the guests on the pier. The evacuation zone supervisor is the housekeeping manager and that person is in continuous communication with the muster station control regarding checking of all cabins and public spaces. Announcements to the guests were in English and Spanish.

There were two reports of anxiety and two guests were brought to the medical facility to be looked after. There were no injuries or any crowd management issues.

When all the guests were on the pier, they were provided shelter and regrouped in areas where there was shelter. Then team members (crew) were dispatched to assist. The HD remained on the ship and was not physically on the pier. She was getting information from team leaders and supervisors from the groups on the pier. Guests were provided water and medical team was available on the pier too. A satellite medical center was set up by the security checkpoint on the pier. The ship's agent/port authority also arranged to have ambulances standing by. The ship's doctors and nurses rotated manning the pier and ship's medical facility. They were also notified that there were some passengers that were medical professionals who stepped up to assist if needed.

They use two radio channels and cell phones to communicate amongst the shipboard evacuation and muster teams. The muster control leaders had radios so they could communicate with the HD. They walked around on the pier to make sure everyone was ok and any needs were accommodated. Additional chairs and food supplies were brought out to the passengers on the pier. The local welcome center helped the ship arrange in distribution of pizza/food to the guests. Since it was lunch time, and the ship could not provide food services the guests were informed they could purchase lunch in town and be reimbursed later. Then as time continued, some guests who left their medications on board, stated they needed these so the special needs team went to each specified cabin and brought these down to the pier. This was about the same time when they started bringing the guests to the local hotels. But, there was a lot of demand for some personal effects left on board so the captain allowed for the housekeeping staff to go back on board the vessel and get items needed for the guests from each housekeeping section and bring these to the pier and hotel. This was prioritized based on the medication needs.

The hotel the guests went to was the Marriott Frenchman's reef. The boardroom was used which had 300 person's capacity and additional rooms were provided later. About 800 people were transported there in priority of special needs and families with children. At the hotel, they were provided with water and snacks. Then later they found another hotel in Sugar Bay that could accommodate 300 guests. Transportation was all provided. Crew went ahead of the guests for logistical support at each location. Refreshments, food and entertainment were provided. Also, the shipboard comedians were sent for entrainment as well.

The ship had a kids center on board and some parents left their kids in the care of the kids center while they went ashore. The youth director and one of the muster station leaders helped reunite the kids that were evacuated with the parents returning from their day ashore.

A satellite front desk was established at both hotels to accommodate any guest special needs while off the ship.

The mood of the guests on the pier was reported to be fine. There were no reports of any issues. After the evacuation the GSM went to the pier to check on things and the HD went to the bridge. The captain later released her so that she could handle communication with the corporate office. The cruise director went to see what the flow was and what the guest needs and challenges were. There was nothing major that they could recall. There was no panic. Some non-English speaking guests wanted more information. The GSM recalled having to update some Italian guests about what was going on.

One challenge was when the shore excursions were planned to come back to the ship. The shore ex team reached out to all the tours and asked if they could extend the excursions back to the pier to avoid congestion. Any guests that wanted to come back, were given the option to return by taxi at the company's expense. There were no challenges. Some of the guests had a bit too much alcohol and we were more vocal. One guest had to be taken by ambulance due to alcohol consumption ashore.

The HD said they used the company's emergency response plan (ERP) to try to spread out tasks to deputies and managers with team members on the front line. They tried to adapt the ERP which was tailored to on board events to the pier outside. Tried to keep the same structure as the ERP. They are familiar with the flow for shipboard emergencies.

At one time, the HD was asked to attend a meeting with the emergency team in St Thomas. They were trying to dispatch the people to the hotels but they were not allowing crew members who were tasked to assist the guests to go. The HD met with them, she believed it was the port security officer. She updated them with what was happening on board and their plan of action. Their concern was the 3500 guests and the hotels cannot accommodate so many guests. They wanted to know the plan of action. Finally, they agreed to letting the busses to depart for the hotels.

Coincidentally, the GSM had just completed the monthly fire safety awareness training with her team just before the fire alarm. She actually initially thought the alarm was a drill. The HD was called by the master and said it was not a drill.

When asked about how many crew were on board at the time of the emergency, they did not remember. They recalled it was significantly more because of the time of day when it was after breakfast which was peak time when the guests were going off the ship. More than a thousand maybe.

When asked what time the first guest left the ship during the evacuation, they did not recall. The security staff would know. When asked when everyone was off the ship, they did not recall exactly when. The checklists would have that information but they were given to the safety officer. The crew alert was around 1140 and the general alarm was about 10 minutes after.

When asked about missing team (crew) members, from the evacuation control, the HD said they will send the neighboring section to check those areas as well. They may dispatch another team member to check that section once they have cleared their area. In this situation, some of the crew members were on shore leave so they had to match up who was on board and who was ashore.

When asked about what they did to account for passengers that they knew were off the ship, it was stated that the ships scheduled departure was 1700 so they knew they could expect all guests to return to the ship by then. But it was not realistic to do any kind of a count on the pier since there were no restriction on the pier where they could cue the guests; it was not logistically possible. They were trying their best to get the ship cleared and safe for the guests to come back on board at which time they would account for them. They did get permission to have the guests return to the ship in the evening so they started the process of accounting for them. If the guest did not have their card to punch in, it would be manually done by security after their identity was verified. They did manage to account for everybody – everything matched up.

When asked what time the all clear was given to bring the guests back, they recalled it was around 2030 but not totally sure; security would have a better record of this. They let some crew back on board beforehand like housekeeping, cooks etc. so they could prepare the ship for the

return of the passengers. The cooks came back on board first so they could start for food preparation for people on the pier making more than 1000 sandwiches for guests and crew. Once the guests were allowed to come back on board, they had crew in the public spaces throughout the ship to greet them back. The guests were also given water and soda free of charge – this was staged in different locations on board.

The toilet system, water and electricity remained functioning the whole time. The elevators were shut down during the emergency. The air conditioning was also shut down. By the time the guests came back on board, everything was up and running. Before that, all systems were checked (i.e. checking the air conditioning etc.).

Communication was intense at the time they were preparing for the guests to come on board. There were no big challenges though. It was a fluid process – they understood the situation was not ideal for the guests but they were able to solve all problems and challenges they faced. They had the means and people available to assist.

When asked if they have ever practiced or drilled on pier evacuations, they said they do port manning drills. The new Emergency Response Plan (ERP) is something they have adopted recently in the company which changed the way they deal in port emergencies. With the previous system, they have simulated port manning drills but that is without passengers. They respond based on their emergency card instructions but they have never simulated this with guests on the pier.

When asked where the chairs and tents came from, they stated these came from the ship. They were provided with additional large tents from shore side personnel. The ships agent helped with this. Also one of the local restaurants came with pizza for the guests.

When asked who remained on board after the evacuation, it was stated the containment team remained behind. Per the ERP manual, that is about a hundred team members. The rest of the crew went off the ship. The only crew that went to the hotels were the ones assigned to do so by the HD. Crew on the pier were also given the option to eat ashore and be reimbursed when back on board; they also had water available to them. The wellbeing of the team (crew), was equally important as that of the guests.

The HD was very proud of the crew and their handling of the situation.

When asked about any lessons learned, improvements and what could have been done better:

- Arrangement of guests on the pier – keep them separated as per their shipboard muster stations as they come off. It would be good if there was a plan so that some crew with crowd control duties be on the pier before the guests arrive to separate/divide them as per their muster stations. They tried this but was not completely accurate. Basically, people could be organized on the pier just like they would muster for their lifeboat.
- It was difficult to account for the 541 guests. They did check the ship and cleared all zones but they needed to double check this on the pier.
- When the guests came back on board - they were eager to come back and they crowded the gangway; not sure how to tackle that. It is easier to manage smaller groups rather

than large groups. The return of the guests could have been organized better not for everyone returning at the same time.

- In any emergency, the main challenge is time. On the pier they should have arranged the guests and per their muster stations. When the ship was in communication with the port authorities, they more supportive with crowd control. As time moved on, some guests were getting frustrated with crew responses to questions – local authorities could have helped more with this. It would be helpful, to have port security to be more involved in crowd control especially when some of the guests became aggressive when coming back on board.
- They printed and hand delivered letters to the guests who were on the pier to explain the situation be transparent. The letters also informed them of the alternate locations (hotels) for them to be accommodated while waiting to board the ship.

When asked about the feedback from the guests after the accident, the HD stated it has all been good. She received very positive feedback. Proof of that is when they did the safety briefing with the special needs team during the crew drill. They were in the lobby and some guests were watching. At the end, the guests applauded them.

She also saw some of the social media related the accident and they were positive for the team. All that positive feedback has been shared with the crew on a poster on I95 for them to see. Some guests were aggravated yes but most were appreciative. The HD walks around the ship to be seen and answer any questions. The only negative feedback has really been about the flight arrangements for them to return home because of the cruise cancellation. Some guests even want to stay on board and want to continue the cruise which made her think they feel safe staying with them.

Another suggestion – maybe upgrade the accountability system. Some kind of electronic way to account for people (i.e. some bar code). This technology should exist on the pier as well.

The interview concluded at 1823.