

Date: February 27, 2024

To: Morgan Turrell, Director, Office of Marine Safety

Through: E. Stolzenberg, Deputy Director, Office of Marine Safety

From: Liam LaRue, Chief, Investigations, Office of Marine Safety
Rob Jones, Deputy Chief, Investigations, Office of Marine Safety

Subject: Close-out memo regarding the Tall Timbers Marina fire

Casualty no.	DCA23FM034
Casualty type	Fire/Explosion
Vessel	<i>Valmara</i> and 9 other boats
Vessel type(s)	Yacht/Boat (recreational)
Location	McKay Cove, Tall Timbers, Maryland 38°10.60' N, 76°32.76' W
Date	June 7, 2023
Time	1227 eastern daylight time (coordinated universal time -4 hours)
Injuries	1 minor
Damage	\$400,000 est.
Environmental damage	Debris and small oil sheen, mostly contained within oil boom; 110 gallons of gasoline and 50 gallons of diesel lost, most of which burned off during fire
Weather	Visibility 10 mi, broken clouds, winds southeast 8 kts, air temperature 76°F, water temperature 71°F
Waterway information	Marina

AUTHORITY:

The National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) has authority under Title 49 *United States Code* 1131 to investigate and establish the probable cause of any major marine casualty involving US-flagged vessels worldwide.

CASUALTY DESCRIPTION:

During the morning and early afternoon of June 7, 2023, a mechanic was performing maintenance on the 1940 Matthews 38-foot motor yacht *Valmara*. The wooden yacht had two inboard gasoline engines, each driving a propeller. Each engine had a separate fuel tank, and the mechanic added about 3 gallons of fuel to each tank in preparation for testing the engines (the tanks had been "bone dry" prior to adding fuel). About 1215, the mechanic started the starboard engine and let it run at idle. About 10-15 minutes later, he turned the ignition key to start the port engine, and an explosion occurred. Flames erupted from behind the engines, expanded forward, and came up onto the main deck through open access hatches. The mechanic evacuated the vessel, and in less than a minute, the vessel was fully engulfed in flames. The fire spread to the docks, to the boat shed over the docks, and to other boats within the shed. Local firefighters extinguished the fire, but the shed, the docks and boats within the shed, and a wooden sea wall were destroyed.

INVESTIGATION:

A Maryland State Fire Marshal, the Maryland Department of the Environment, and investigators from the NTSB gathered factual information about this casualty.

The state fire marshal conducted an investigation into the origin and cause of the fire; however, because the boats damaged in the fire had sunk, he did not determine an origin. Based on the state fire marshal's interview with the mechanic, he determined that the cause of the fire was the ignition of fuel vapors while the engines were running on the Matthews motor yacht.

CONCLUSION:

The preliminary investigation found that the vessels involved in the fire were state-registered, used for recreational purposes, and were moored at the time of the casualty. The US Coast Guard will not produce an investigation report. There does not appear to be any commercial maritime operational or design nexus. Therefore, we have determined that this casualty does not warrant continued investigation and recommend we close this investigation.

Director's Concurrence

Acting for Morgan Turrell

Morgan Turrell, Director, Office of Marine Safety