



National Transportation Safety Board

Washington, D.C. 20594

Office of Marine Safety

Interview Summary

Accident: Fire aboard Small Passenger Vessel *Conception* (NTSB No. DCA19MM047)

Date: September 2, 2019 at 0314 PDT

Location: Platts Harbor, Pacific Ocean near Santa Cruz Island, California, 34°02.99' N, 119°44.10' W

Person Interviewed: Mr. Kenneth Dehler, passenger on *Vision* October 7 to 10, 2018

Interview Conducted By: Adam Tucker, NTSB – by telephone

Summary Provided By: Adam Tucker, NTSB

OVERVIEW

Mr. Dehler was a passenger on board the Truth Aquatics, Inc. small passenger vessel *Vision*, from October 7 to 10, 2018 during a chartered dive trip with the Bug Brothers group. Mr. Dehler was interviewed via telephone on August 13, 2020, between 1527 and 1549 EDT in conjunction with the investigation into the September 2 accident involving the small passenger vessel *Conception*, which caught fire and sank resulting in 34 fatalities while it was anchored in Platts Harbor off Santa Cruz Island, California. Mr. Dehler was asked to detail what he remembered about a reported battery charging fire that took place on the *Vision* on October 8, 2018 while he was on board. Unless specifically delineated by quotes, the text that follows is not a verbatim record of the conversation. It has been developed from notes taken of the interview.

INTERVIEW SUMMARY

Mr. Dehler did not recall exactly what time it was, but it was early morning when he had gotten up from sleeping in the bunkroom and went to use the restroom on the deck above. While returning from the restroom, and just going down the stairs to the bunkroom, Mr. Dehler heard a “snap” and “fizz” sound which got his attention. He looked at the other passenger that was awake at the time and said to him, “what was that?”. He recognized the other passenger as Mr. Jeff Fay. Both men looked towards the back of the salon near the entrance where there was a bookshelf. There was a power strip there and he saw one of the chargers “going up” like a “torch” with “fire and smoke”. He ran over to it and grabbed underneath the charger, unplugged it, and ran out of the salon and threw it in the rinse bin on the aft deck which had water in it. He then went back into the salon and saw that Mr. Fay was already cleaning up around the bookshelf. There was no crew in the galley or salon at the time, so he yelled up to the crew quarters and said, “hey there was a fire”. One of the crew came down, he didn’t recall who, and he and Mr. Fay told the crew member one of the chargers exploded.

When asked to describe the smoke and fire, Mr. Dehler stated the smoke wasn’t black and there was active flame coming from the charger which burned the plastic. He described it as being “pressurized” like a “torch”. He saw the bookcase get singed. He didn’t notice anything else since he had removed the charger and had taken it outside and tossed it in the rinse bin. When he came back in, Mr. Fay had already been cleaning up the bookshelf. When asked if the power strip the charger was plugged into was also removed, Mr. Dehler stated he couldn’t exactly remember but thought it was just the charger. He thought the power strip was screwed into the wall.

When asked about the crewmember that came down, Mr. Dehler recalled they told him what happened, and he took a look at the burnt charger. When asked if the crew member was the captain, Mr. Dehler said he did not remember. He did not know the crew that well. He only goes on the Truth Aquatics trips once a year with the Bug Brothers group.

When asked if he had noticed any crew members up and around any time before, Mr. Dehler said that he had only woken up that one time to go to the restroom during that trip. When asked if the passengers were ever informed that there would be a roving watch during their trip, Mr. Dehler said he did not remember anyone ever saying that.

Mr. Dehler normally does trips on the *Peace* dive boat, which is based out of Ventura, CA. He said that every time he woke up at night, there was always somebody in the galley which was usually the cook. The *Peace* boat is smaller and has a smaller bunkroom.

When asked if he recalled a fire extinguisher being used, Mr. Dehler recalled maybe seeing some dry chemical from a fire extinguisher but could not remember exactly. He did not see any fire extinguisher being discharged noting that he was outside.

When asked if the charger and batteries reacted with the water when he threw them in the rinse bin, Mr. Dehler said he was nervous that would happen so he stood away from it and tossed it into the rinse bin, and the fire went out. He left it in the rinse bin and told the crewmember that came down where it was located.

END SUMMARY