



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. Jeffery Fay, passenger on *Vision* October 7 to 10, 2018

Interview Conducted By: Adam Tucker, NTSB – by telephone

Summary Provided By: Adam Tucker, NTSB

OVERVIEW

Mr. Fay 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. Fay was interviewed via telephone on August 13, 2020, between 1224 and 1353 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. Fay 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. Fay was up early in the morning of October 8, 2018 and was in the galley preparing food. Some time between 0415–0425, he heard a “sizzle” followed by a high “hissing” noise and then a “loud bang”. He looked in the direction of the sound and saw on the bookshelf, which was there since the day the *Vision* was built, a fire on the second shelf down from the top. There was another passenger that was on his way back from the bathroom that also heard the sounds as well who he identified as Mr. Kenneth Dehler. Mr. Fay grabbed the fire extinguisher that was in the galley and walked toward the fire and set the extinguisher on one of the tables. He saw the charger was melting on one side of and there was residue on the bookshelf. The other passenger grabbed the charger and batteries, unplugged it and threw it in the mask rinsing bin. Once the charger was removed, seeing there were still smoldering items on the bookshelf, Mr. Fay grabbed the fire extinguisher and “shot” at it once. He then began to pull all the papers off the shelf and then wet some big sponges and wet down the area to eliminate all remaining heat. After the charger was removed, which Mr. Fay stated was the only item charging on that shelf, he saw embers imbedded in the wood.

After the fire was extinguished, Mr. Fay stated he went upstairs to the crew quarters and notified the captain, identified as Mr. Tommy Cappannelli, that there had been a small fire because of batteries exploding. The captain came down and took pictures. Mr. Fay, who said he has known Mr. Cappannelli for a long time, said he told him that he should inform the other boats of this to which Mr. Cappannelli said that he would do so.

When asked if he saw an open flame, Mr. Fay said it has been a while, but described what he saw was not a huge flame. The papers on the shelf were all burning; they went from white to brown.

A few trips later, Mr. Fay said he could still see the black burn marks in the wood of the shelf but noted that on a later trip, the marks were no longer there.

When asked what fire extinguisher he used, he said it was a general A, B, C and D type powder extinguisher. He used it to extinguish the papers and the imbedded metal in the wood shelving. He shot it with the fire extinguisher first since he was bare handed and didn't want to grab anything still burning.

When asked about the charger and batteries that caught fire, Mr. Fay stated they were for a dive light. He noted that there were no dive cameras on the trip. When asked what happened with the charger and batteries afterward, Mr. Fay stated they were thrown into the ocean.

Mr. Fay questioned why the NTSB, since it covers all modes of transportation, and with recent aviation accidents related to lithium-ion batteries prompting regulatory carriage requirements from the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), why this was not communicated with the Coast Guard. Mr. Fay stated that they are sometimes boarded by the Coast Guard on trips where the license of the captain and the life preservers are checked. He noted that this would be "prime time" for the Coast Guard to look around and see the vessel while in operation. When they were boarded by the Coast Guard, they were usually on and off within five minutes.

Mr. Fay stated he has been on Truth Aquatics boats for 35 years and that he did the second trip on the *Vision* after it was christened. He stated he has never felt unsafe on Truth Aquatics vessels or with the people that run them. The company was a "top notch run place".

When asked, based on his 35 years of trips on Truth Aquatics vessels, if he had seen a roving watch being conducted, Mr. Fay said that once he goes to sleep at night, he is out and wouldn't know if there was somebody up and about or not. He did note that on occasion when getting up to go to the restroom at night he has seen crew up and about but could not say if that was their tasking or if they were just up. Mr. Fay recalled that one time when he was on the *Vision* with the same captain years ago, while anchored off Santa Cruz Island, he got up to go to the restroom in the early morning and when he got there, he smelled an electrical burning smell. He looked around and didn't see anything and went back to his bunk. Still bothered by the smell, Mr. Fay got back up and when he was about halfway through the salon, he saw black smoke coming out of the engine room. At about the same time, the captain was coming down the stairs. They opened the engine room sliding hatch and black smoke came out. The captain, wanting to enter the engine room, was given a SCUBA regulator and mask with an 18-foot hose attached to a SCUBA tank. The captain entered the engine room where he discovered a bearing had seized on the alternator for the generator. This caused the rubber alternator belt to get hot and melt causing the smoke, but no fire. The captain shut the generator down, and later that day another boat came out with a replacement alternator and the problem was fixed.

END SUMMARY