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## Minutes: Forum #116

**Date:** December 13, 2018  
**Time:** 10:00 AM  
**Location:** University of Southern Maine  
Room 213 (Second Floor) Abromson Center  
88 Bedford Street  
Portland, ME 04101

### 1. National Transportation Safety Board EL FARO Seminar:

*Introductions* – The meeting was called to order at 10:00 by the Port Safety Forum Co-Chair Matt Burns representing the Maine Port Authority with Captain Brian LeFebvre as the Co-Chair representing the Coast Guard. A quorum was comprised of 65 individuals.

In light of the importance of the NTSB's presentation, the normal Port Safety Forum agenda was deferred to avail the entire meeting to discussion of the El Faro incident.

### 2. National Transportation Safety Board Overview:

*Program Overview* – Mr. Brian Curtis of the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) provided a detailed overview of the NTSB's role, mission, and authorities. The was established in 1967 to conduct independent investigations of all civil aviation accidents in the United States and major accidents in the other modes of transportation. It is not part of the Department of Transportation, nor organizationally affiliated with any of DOT's modal agencies, including the Federal Aviation Administration. The Safety Board has no regulatory or enforcement powers.

To ensure that Safety Board investigations focus only on improving transportation safety, the Board's analysis of factual information and its determination of probable cause cannot be entered as evidence in a court of law.

### 3. National Transportation Safety Board EL FARO Seminar:

For a full abstract of the investigation please refer to  
<https://www.nts.gov/news/events/Documents/2017-DCA16MM001-BMG-Abstract.pdf>

*Investigation Summary (as summarized by the NTSB)* - On October 1, 2015, during Hurricane Joaquin, the US-flagged cargo ship SS El Faro sank in the Atlantic Ocean about 40 nautical miles northeast of Acklins and Crooked Island, Bahamas. All 33 people on board perished. El Faro was owned by TOTE Maritime Puerto Rico and operated by TOTE Services, Inc. Damages from the sinking were estimated at \$36 million. Before the loss of El Faro, the last comparable US maritime disaster was the sinking of the US bulk carrier Marine Electric off the coast of Virginia in February 1983, in which all but three of the 34 persons aboard lost their lives.

The NTSB's investigation of the sinking identified the following safety issues:

- Captain's actions
- Use of noncurrent weather information
- Late decision to muster the crew
- Ineffective bridge resource management
- Inadequate company oversight
- Company's safety management system
- Flooding in cargo holds
- Loss of propulsion
- Downflooding through ventilation closures
- Need for damage control plan
- Lack of suitable survival craft

***Probable Cause*** (as summarized by the NTSB) - The National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) determines that the probable cause of the sinking of El Faro and the subsequent loss of life was the captain's insufficient action to avoid Hurricane Joaquin, his failure to use the most current weather information, and his late decision to muster the crew.

Contributing to the sinking was ineffective bridge resource management on board El Faro, which included the captain's failure to adequately consider officers' suggestions.

Also contributing to the sinking was the inadequacy of both TOTE's oversight and its safety management system. Further contributing factors to the loss of El Faro were flooding in a cargo hold from an undetected open watertight scuttle and damaged seawater piping; loss of propulsion due to low lube oil pressure to the main engine resulting from a sustained list; and subsequent downflooding through unsecured ventilation closures to the cargo holds.

Also contributing to the loss of the vessel was the lack of an approved damage control plan that would have assisted the crew in recognizing the severity of the vessel's condition and in responding to the emergency.

Contributing to the loss of life was the lack of appropriate survival craft for the conditions.

#### **4. Next Meeting:**

**Date:** April 17, 2019  
**Time:** 10:00 AM  
**Location:** University of Maine  
Hutchinson Center  
80 Belmont Ave  
Belfast, ME 04915