



October 2, 2024

MIR-24-31

Engine Room Fire aboard Yacht *Savage*

On March 8, 2024, about 0330 local time, a fire broke out in the engine room aboard the 75-foot-long yacht *Savage* while the vessel was transiting about 2 miles off the coast of Cape Henry, near Virginia Beach, Virginia (see figure 1 and figure 2).¹ After attempting to extinguish the fire, all three crewmembers donned immersion suits, entered the water, and were rescued by a nearby pilot boat. The burning vessel was towed to shore and intentionally grounded. A local fire department extinguished the fire from shore. There were no injuries, and no pollution was reported. The *Savage*, valued at \$600,000, was a total loss.



Figure 1. *Savage* underway at unknown date before the fire. (Source: Captain Ethan Hanks, NBD Marine Services LLC)

¹ In this report, all times are eastern standard time, and all miles are nautical miles (1.15 statute miles). (b) Visit [nts.gov](https://www.nts.gov) to find additional information in the [public docket](#) for this NTSB investigation (case no. DCA24FM026). Use the [CAROL Query](#) to search investigations.

Casualty Summary

Casualty type	Fire/Explosion
Location	Atlantic Ocean, about 2 nm from Cape Henry, near Virginia Beach, Virginia 36°55.53' N, 75°58.88' W
Date	March 8, 2024
Time	About 0330 eastern standard time (coordinated universal time -5 hrs)
Persons on board	3
Injuries	None
Property damage	\$600,000 est.
Environmental damage	None
Weather	Visibility 10 nm, overcast, winds east-northeast 8 kts, air temperature 48°F, water temperature 50°F, morning twilight 0602, sunrise 0628
Waterway information	Ocean, depth about 40 ft

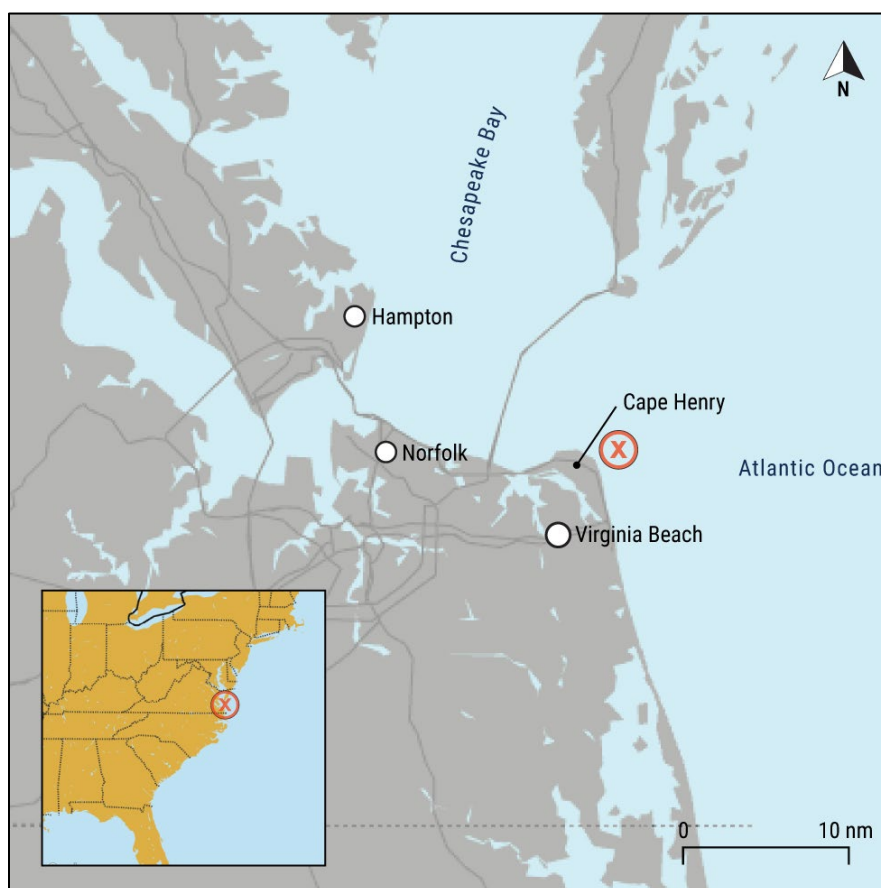


Figure 2. Area where the fire broke out aboard the *Savage*, as indicated by a circled X. (Background source: Google Maps)

1 Factual Information

On March 4, 2024, the 75-foot-long, fiberglass-hulled yacht *Savage* departed from New Bedford, Massachusetts, bound for Hampton, Virginia. Before departing, the three-person crew—consisting of a captain, first mate, and a second mate—inspected the lifesaving and firefighting equipment. They also inspected the vessel and found it in good condition. The West Tide boat had three diesel propulsion engines and two 15-kilowatt diesel generators. The vessel was equipped with 10 fire extinguishers, 10 lifejackets, 4 immersion suits, a dinghy, and an emergency position indicating radio beacon (EPIRB). In addition, the second mate had a personal locator beacon (PLB), which was registered to a friend, in her “ditch bag” (abandon ship bag).

The voyage was uneventful until the vessel reached the entrance to the Chesapeake Bay off the coast of Cape Henry, Virginia, on March 8. About 0330, the second mate woke the captain to advise him that she and the first mate had smelled something burning and believed there was an electrical fire on the vessel. At this time, the vessel was transiting at 6 knots. The captain and the first mate went to the wheelhouse (located on the main deck), and, according to the captain, “secured the A/C [air-conditioning] breakers and turned off the vessel’s engines.” They entered the unoccupied owner’s stateroom below the wheelhouse and found it filled with smoke but saw no signs of fire. They looked into the engine room, which was on the same deck as the owner’s stateroom, via a window in the engine room door, and saw that it was also filled with smoke, but they did not see any signs of fire.

About a minute later, the second mate yelled that she saw fire in the owner’s stateroom. The captain returned to the owner’s stateroom with a fire extinguisher but was unable to enter the space due to the severity of the fire. He ordered the first mate to make a distress call on the VHF radio. The first mate made the call and then brought three immersion suits to the bow of the vessel. He observed flames covering the main deck as he headed to the bow.

The captain attempted to go down the port side of the exterior main deck (aft) to reach the EPIRB and the dinghy, but flames blocked his path. The captain joined the other crewmembers on the main deck at the bow of the *Savage*, and they began donning their immersion suits. A nearby pilot boat from the Virginia Pilot Association, which was underway bringing two pilots to inbound vessels, received the mayday call and immediately headed toward the *Savage*.

The crewmembers estimated that they had the immersion suits “about 80%” of the way on before the flames got too close, and they all jumped from the bow into the 50°F water. Once in the water, they finished donning their immersion suits, and

the captain activated the second mate's PLB. Ten minutes later, about 0345, the responding pilot boat arrived on scene and brought all three crewmembers aboard.

The captain estimated that they abandoned the vessel about 3 minutes after seeing the first flame (see figure 3). The captain said he did not think the fire was electrical, and he believed that the fire originated on the starboard side of the engine room. He estimated that something falling onto the exhaust of an operating engine could have started the fire. The first mate also stated he believed the fire started in the engine room and that the vessel previously had an exhaust problem on one of the engines.

Later that morning, the burning vessel was towed to Joint Expeditionary Base Little Creek-Fort Story in Virginia Beach, Virginia, and intentionally grounded. Local firefighters from the Virginia Beach Fire Department extinguished the fire using shoreside equipment.

The vessel was destroyed in the fire and was declared a total loss. The remains of the *Savage* were removed from the shoreline of the military base and disposed of before investigators were able to inspect the vessel.



Figure 3. The *Savage* during the casualty. (Source: Virginia Beach Fire Department via US Coast Guard)

2 Analysis

Based on crew statements, the fire originated in the vessel's engine room. Potential ignition sources include the operating diesel propulsion engines and electrical generator, and other equipment. The extensive damage to the vessel precluded examination of components, and, therefore, the exact ignition source could not be determined.

3 Conclusions

3.1 Probable Cause

The National Transportation Safety Board determines that the probable cause of the fire aboard the *Savage* was an undetermined ignition source within the engine room.

Vessel Particulars

Vessel	<i>Savage</i>
Type	Yacht/Boat (Yacht)
Owner/Operator	Private citizen (Private)
Flag	United States
Port of registry	Stuart, Florida
Year built	1986
Official number	950565 (US)
IMO number	N/A
Classification society	N/A
Length (overall)	75.0 ft (22.9 m)
Breadth (max.)	19.6 ft (6.0 m)
Draft (Depth)	11.0 ft (3.4 m)
Tonnage	108 GRT
Engine power; manufacturer	3 x 230 hp (172 kW); Caterpillar 3208 diesel engines

NTSB investigators worked closely with our counterparts from **Coast Guard Sector Virginia** throughout this investigation.

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For more detailed background information on this report, visit the [NTSB Case Analysis and Reporting Online \(CAROL\) website](#) and search for NTSB accident ID DCA24FM026. Recent publications are available in their entirety on the [NTSB website](#). Other information about available publications also may be obtained from the website or by contacting—

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