The Swedish Club

MONTHLY SAFETY SCENARIO

AUGUST 2025

Container vessel made heavy contact with a wharf

A container vessel finished loading cargo at a container terminal on the morning of the accident date. Following loading, the plan was to depart later that morning for another port to load additional cargo.

09:00 (Tests)
The crew tested bridge equipment, main engine and steering gear. No faults were found.

09:36 (Pilot Boards)
A pilot, employed by the local port authority, arrived on board. The engine was on standby awaiting departure instructions.

09:40 (Initial Master-Pilot Exchange)
The Master and Pilot briefly discussed the vessel's readiness and the general plan for unberthing. Both considered the manoeuvre routine; the pilot had performed similar departures from the same berth previously under comparable tidal conditions.

09:45 (Engine Control to Port Bridge Wing)
Manoeuvring control was transferred to the port bridge wing, where the pilot and master positioned themselves.

09:47 (Tug Made Fast)
A single assisting tug (referred to here as Tug A) secured at the vessel's starboard quarter with a pulling capacity of around 50+ tonnes of bollard pull.

09:52 (Readiness and Traffic Update)
The pilot informed VTS that the vessel was ready to sail. VTS reported one outbound and two inbound vessels, none posing an immediate conflict.

09:58 (All Lines Let Go)
The master and pilot, now at the port wing console, oversaw the final release of lines.

Tug and Bow Thruster Used: At the pilot's command, Tug A pulled the vessel's stern off the quay while the bow thruster

pushed the bow to starboard, moving the vessel out and parallel to the berth.

09:59 (Engine to 'Dead Slow Ahead')
With the vessel clear and steady, the pilot ordered minimal ahead propulsion to begin moving away from the berth.

10:00 (Engine Increased to 'Slow Ahead')
The pilot increased propulsion slightly to continue gaining distance from the berth and establish steerage.

10:01 (Initial Helm Orders & Tug Release)
The pilot instructed the helmsman to apply 20° of port rudder, planning to swing the vessel to port around a bend in the river.

Tug Released: Immediately after giving the port-helm order, the pilot released Tug A, assuming the vessel now had enough steerage control.

10:01:28 (Helm to 'Midships')
The pilot ordered the helm back to midships, intending to let the vessel begin a gentle turn or maintain a course that would position her for the next manoeuvre.

10:02 (Engine to 'Half Ahead')
The pilot increased speed to make a more effective turn around the river bend.

10:02:50s (Report to Traffic Services)
The pilot informed VTS that the vessel was clear of the berth and proceeding toward the opposite side of the river.

10:03 (Shifting Engine Control / Second Helm Order)
Engine Control to Central Console: The pilot and master left the bridge wing and moved to the central conning station.

Helm: 'Port 20°' (Again): The pilot repeated a 20° port rudder instruction to initiate or continue the port swing.

10:03:48 (Helm to 'Hard-a-Port')
Within seconds, the pilot observed the bow swinging starboard instead of port. Suspecting the helmsman might have misapplied the rudder, he ordered the helm hard to port.

The helmsman and chief officer confirmed the rudder was already hard to port. The pilot then assumed there could be a steering problem, as the vessel kept swinging starboard.

Master's Intervention
With the vessel increasing its turn to starboard, the master suggested using full astern power to reduce speed. The pilot immediately agreed.

10:04 (Engine to 'Full Astern')
The engine was set to maximum reverse. However, the vessel's forward speed (about 7 knots over ground) was too great, and the distance to the opposite wharf was too short to stop in time.

The pilot requested Tug A to return as quickly as possible, but the situation was futile.

10:06 (Contact with the Wharf)
At around 3–4 knots, the vessel's bow struck the wharf just behind a moored vessel. Damage to the vessel included a punctured forepeak tank, the wharf sustained superficial damage.

Fortunately, there were no injuries or pollution.

Questions

When discussing this case please consider that the actions taken at the time made sense for all involved. Do not only judge but also ask why you think these actions were taken and could this happen on your vessel?

1. Does our SMS address these risks?
2. How can bridge teams and pilots better identify and plan for complex tidal and current interactions near berths or river bends?
3. What factors should be considered before releasing an assisting tug?
4. What key details should be discussed during the Master-Pilot Exchange?
5. When should a manoeuvre be aborted?
6. What specific contingencies could be in place to quickly regain control if the vessel's heading does not respond as expected to helm or thruster orders?
7. How do we ensure that each bridge team member (Pilot, Master, officers, helmsman, and tug operators) clearly understands their roles and responsibilities during unberthing?
8. What techniques can be applied to maintain situational awareness and encourage prompt cross-checking of helm orders and vessel reactions?
9. How can we improve or update local navigation guidelines or risk assessments so that they account for tidal anomalies, berth-specific challenges, and the need for sufficient tug support?
10. Is there any kind of training that we should do that addresses these issues?
11. What immediate, actionable steps can we take from today's discussion?