

# Marine Accident Brief Report

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## Fire On Board the Netherlands-Registered Passenger Ship *Nieuw Amsterdam* Glacier Bay, Alaska May 23, 2000

(Extract – full text at: <http://www.nts.gov/Publictn/2001/MBR0101.pdf>)

NTSB/MBR-01/01

PB2001-916402

Notation 7377

Adopted July 24, 2001



National Transportation Safety Board  
490 L'Enfant Plaza, S.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20594

**Accident Description**

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At 0932, the fire detection panel indicated that a smoke alarm had activated in a crew staircase on the main deck. At this time, about 20 minutes after the first smoke alarm, the master began broadcasting announcements to clear some of the affected areas. After ordering the low-location lighting turned on, he announced that all passengers on C deck should move to a higher deck and that passenger-assist teams should check that all cabins on C deck had been evacuated. The master then instructed the cruise director to assume responsibility for making the evacuation announcements. By this time, the fire detection panel indicated that a smoke detector had activated at 0936 in a crew stairwell on the promenade deck. Shortly thereafter, about 25 minutes after the first smoke alarm, the chief officer returned to the bridge and assumed the command of firefighting operations from the master.

At 0941, or a half hour after the first alarm, the cruise director announced that all passengers and crewmembers should move from C deck, B deck, A deck, and the main deck to a higher-level deck. He then ordered the ship's rescue squad to ensure that decks B and A had been evacuated. Shortly after 0947, at the master's instructions, the cruise director announced that all passengers should move from inside the vessel to an outside deck. He also directed passenger-assist teams and evacuation teams to check and, if necessary, move anyone from the interior areas of the decks to an outside deck.<sup>9</sup>

Shipboard personnel said that, at the sounding of the general alarm, most passengers listening to the commentary on the upper decks proceeded to their muster stations, as directed in the practice drill held when the ship departed Vancouver.<sup>10</sup> Also, most passengers who were in their cabins retrieved their lifejackets and proceeded directly to their stations. Some passengers returned to their cabins to retrieve their lifejackets. One couple in the lido deck restaurant first finished their breakfast and then went to their cabin, which was on B deck, to retrieve their lifejackets, medicine, and valuables. They said that they also wanted to obtain warm clothing for the outside air. The couple said that when they reached B deck, they observed the passageway was "a little smoky." They estimated that they stayed in their cabin about 6-7 minutes. Meanwhile, at the muster stations, crewmembers took roll of the assembled passengers, as required by Holland America's SMS, and informed the master that passengers from a cabin on B deck and a cabin on main deck could not be accounted for.

The master then ordered evacuation teams with SCBAs to check the two cabins and decks for the missing people. About this time, the two passengers who had returned to their cabin on B deck exited their room and encountered thick smoke that severely

reduced visibility. The woman put her jacket over her face and moved aft along the passageway. She said that her husband told her to get down near the deck. He followed her and shouted for help. She said that as she neared a doorway and stairs, a crewmember grabbed her and led her to the crew mess hall and then to the promenade deck. She then advised the crewmembers that her husband was still on B deck. According to the husband, when he crouched to move along the deck, he became disoriented. He thought that he might have passed some exit doors (FSDs that were closed) and that he might have blacked out at one point. He said that a crewmember grabbed him and helped him up the stairs first to the crew mess hall and then to the promenade deck to rejoin his wife. A shipboard medical team examined the couple to determine the scope of their injuries. They were later evacuated by medical helicopter to a hospital in Juneau, where the husband was admitted for treatment of injuries.

<sup>9</sup>In postaccident interviews, the master stated that his primary concern during the emergency was to move passengers outside and away from any smoke.

<sup>10</sup>The *Nieuw Amsterdam* had conducted an emergency drill, which is required by SOLAS, shortly after the ship left Vancouver. According to Holland America officials, during the drill, passengers had been told that, if they heard the general alarm, they should retrieve their lifejackets and proceed to their muster stations. They also had been told that, if they were not in their cabins, they should proceed immediately to their muster areas and that lifejackets would be provided to them.

The Safety Board is aware that the International Maritime Organization's Maritime Safety Committee has established a working group to consider safety on large passenger ships. The working group is considering safety on existing and future large passenger ship from a global perspective, that is, from an overall systems-safety approach. In reviewing large passenger ship safety issues, the working group is also considering matters related to the human element, such as operations, management, and training. The Safety Board believes that the Coast Guard should submit the lessons learned from the *Nieuw Amsterdam*'s accident, in particular the need for proper firefighting management and the need to control the spread of smoke, to the IMO working group for its consideration.