



# National Transportation Safety Board

## Marine Accident Brief

### Engine Room Fire on Board Recreational Vessel *La Pietra*, with Subsequent Sinking

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<b>Accident no.</b>	DCA14LM012
<b>Vessel name</b>	<i>La Pietra</i>
<b>Accident type</b>	Engine room fire; sinking
<b>Location</b>	About 4 miles* southwest of Destruction Island, Washington, and about 100 miles west of Seattle, Washington; 47°37.4' N, 124°31.9' W
<b>Date</b>	July 4, 2014
<b>Time</b>	Fire: 1058 Pacific daylight time (coordinated universal time – 7 hours) Sinking: 1948
<b>Injuries</b>	Smoke inhalation and minor burns
<b>Property damage</b>	Total loss of vessel, valued at about \$360,000
<b>Environmental damage</b>	Small oil sheen initially sighted; vessel had about 600 gallons of diesel fuel on board
<b>Weather</b>	Clear visibility, west winds at 2 knots, air temperature 68°F
<b>Waterway information</b>	Near-coastal waters off the Washington coast

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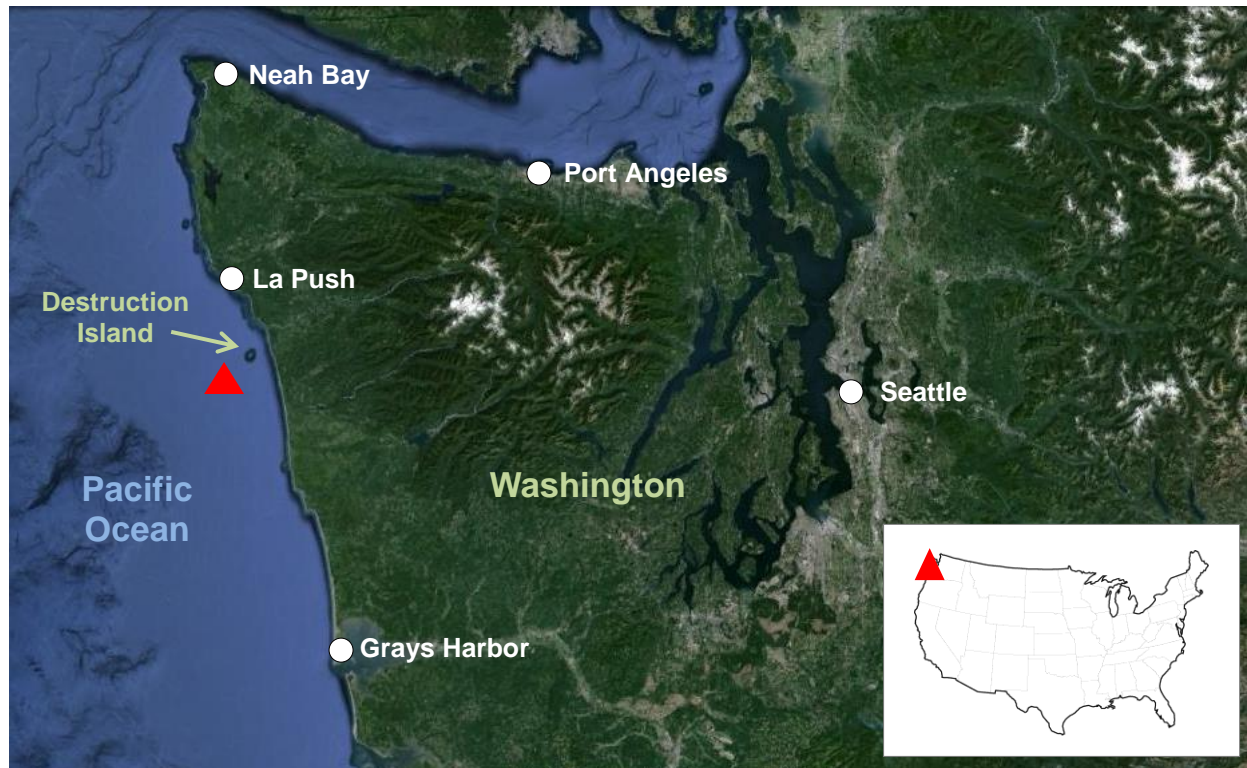
On July 4, 2014, at 1058 local time, a fire broke out in the engine room on board the 79-foot-long recreational vessel *La Pietra*, when the vessel was near Destruction Island, Washington. The onboard vessel owners (husband and wife) were rescued by the US Coast Guard; the husband was treated for smoke inhalation and minor burns. *La Pietra* burned to the waterline and sank with 600 gallons of diesel fuel on board.



***La Pietra* before the accident. (Photo provided by the Coast Guard)**

\* Unless otherwise noted, all miles in this report are nautical miles (1.15 statute miles).

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Satellite image of northwest Washington state. The accident location is marked by a red triangle. (Background by Google Earth)

The recreational vessel *La Pietra* departed Grays Harbor, Washington, at 0600 on the morning of the accident. The vessel owners intended to take an approximately 100-mile coastal voyage to Neah Bay, Washington. The husband told investigators that, at 1058, when the vessel was near Destruction Island and transiting at a speed of 10 knots, numerous audible and visual alarms activated in the wheelhouse, including an alarm for the rudder indicator and the autopilot. In addition, the vessel's battery monitor screen went blank. The vessel owners noticed smoke aft, in the vicinity of the engine room, and the husband ran aft to investigate. Although no flames were visible at the time, the engine room was completely filled with black smoke.

After closing the engine room door, the husband returned to the wheelhouse, where he activated the very high frequency (VHF) radio distress alarm and broadcasted a Mayday emergency call on VHF channel 16. He then returned to the engine room with a portable fire extinguisher, which he discharged into the space from the doorway. He described the smoke as so thick that he could stay only for a second. He stated that, in addition to the portable fire extinguisher, the vessel's onboard Halon fixed fire suppression system was deployed, but these efforts did not extinguish the fire.

The husband told investigators he then realized that the engine room ventilation system was still running; however, he could not access the engine room to shut it off. Therefore, because fresh air continued to enter the engine room, the fire continued to burn. The husband returned to the wheelhouse and again contacted the Coast Guard to provide his location and status. He and his wife retrieved the portable VHF and moved to the top deck. From there, the husband discharged the vessel's three remaining portable fire extinguishers through the engine room vents, without effect.

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Coast Guard Sector Puget Sound launched a helicopter from Air Station Port Angeles, Washington, and a motor lifeboat (MLB) from Station Quillayute River in La Push, Washington. The helicopter and the MLB arrived on scene about the same time (1135). Their crews reported seeing flames coming out of the starboard-side vents and the husband fighting the fire with portable fire extinguishers. Both the husband and the wife had donned life jackets, but they did not yet believe they needed to abandon the vessel. The MLB crew provided the husband two additional portable fire extinguishers and, at 1159, reported to the Coast Guard chain-of-command that the flames appeared to be out. However, by 1209, the husband had resumed fighting the fire with the portable extinguishers and, at that point, the wife evacuated *La Pietra* and boarded the MLB. At 1236, with the fire out of control, the husband abandoned ship to the MLB, having sustained smoke inhalation and minor burns to his foot. The MLB transported the couple to La Push, where the husband received medical care.



***La Pietra* ablaze. (Photo by the Coast Guard)**

The Coast Guard contacted Foss Towing requesting a salvage vessel, and the towing vessel *Jeffrey Foss* got under way at 1343 from Neah Bay, arriving on scene about 4 miles southwest of Destruction Island at 1909. At 1948, the *Jeffrey Foss* reported that *La Pietra* had sunk. An approximately 15-foot by 15-foot oil sheen on the water was initially sighted but could not be confirmed.

The vessel owners told investigators that they purchased *La Pietra* for \$310,000 only 20 days before the fire and that they subsequently spent an additional \$50,000 on electronic navigation equipment, routine engine maintenance, and upgrades to the exhaust system.

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### Probable Cause

The National Transportation Safety Board determines that the probable cause of the *La Pietra* accident was an engine room fire of unknown origin. Contributing to the loss of the vessel was the owners' inability to access and shut off the engine room ventilation system, which diminished the effectiveness of the fire suppression system and extinguishing efforts.

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### Vessel Particulars

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Vessel	<i>La Pietra</i>
Owner/operator	Privately owned
Port of registry	Los Angeles, California
Flag	United States
Type	Recreational; general
Year built	1986
Official number (US)	901461
IMO number	N/A
Construction	Fiberglass
Length	78.7 ft (24 m)
Draft	6.5 ft (2 m)
Beam/width	17.7 ft (5.4 m)
Gross and/or ITC tonnage	109 gross tons
Engine power; manufacturer	Two 460 hp (342.7 kW) diesel engines; Caterpillar
Persons on board	Two

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For more details about this accident, visit [www.nts.gov](http://www.nts.gov) and search for NTSB accident ID DCA14LM012.

**Adopted: September 1, 2015**

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

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The NTSB has authority to investigate and establish the probable cause of any major marine casualty or any marine casualty involving both public and nonpublic vessels under 49 *United States Code* 1131. This report is based on factual information either gathered by NTSB investigators or provided by the Coast Guard from its informal investigation of the accident.

The NTSB does not assign fault or blame for a marine casualty; rather, as specified by NTSB regulation, “[NTSB] investigations are fact-finding proceedings with no formal issues and no adverse parties . . . and are not conducted for the purpose of determining the rights or liabilities of any person.” 49 *Code of Federal Regulations*, Section 831.4.

Assignment of fault or legal liability is not relevant to the NTSB’s statutory mission to improve transportation safety by conducting investigations and issuing safety recommendations. In addition, statutory language prohibits the admission into evidence or use of any part of an NTSB report related to an accident in a civil action for damages resulting from a matter mentioned in the report. 49 *United States Code*, Section 1154(b).

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