



The United States Attorney's Office

Eastern District of North Carolina

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

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CARGO SHIPS' CHIEF ENGINEER PLEADS GUILTY

TO VIOLATING POLLUTION PREVENTION ACT

RALEIGH - United States Attorney George E.B. Holding announced that in federal court today **VAJA SIKHARULIDZE**, a citizen of Georgia, pled guilty before United States District Judge James C. Dever, III, to violating the Act to Prevent Pollution from Ships (APPS), in violation of Title 33, United States Code, Sections 1901, et. seq.

A Criminal Information was filed on April 23, 2010.

SIKHARULIDZE, 59, was the Chief Engineer of the Motor Tanker Chem Faros, a 21,145 gross-ton ocean-going cargo ship. The ship was operated by Cooperative Success Maritime SA and regularly transported cargo between various ports in Asia and the United States, to include Morehead City, North Carolina.

Consistent with requirements in the APPS regulations, a vessel other than an oil tanker, must maintain a record known as an Oil Record Book in which transfer and disposal of all oil-contaminated waste and the discharge overboard and disposal otherwise of such waste, must be fully and accurately recorded by the person in charge of the operations. Oil-contaminated bilge waste can be discharged overboard if it is processed through on-board pollution prevention equipment known as the Oily Water Separator (OWS), which is used to separate the water from the oil and other wastes, and the effluent contains 15 parts per million or less of oil.

The investigation revealed that from March 4, 2010, through March 29, 2010, **SIKHARULIDZE**, who had overall responsibility for the Engine Department, failed to maintain an accurate Oil Record Book for the disposals of oil residue and discharges overboard and disposals of oily sludges, oily mixtures, slops from bilges and bilge water that accumulated in machinery spaces. Specifically, the Oil Record Book failed to show discharges of oil-contaminated waste made without the use of the ship's pollution prevention equipment.

Further, from September, 2009, until March 2010, engine department crew members pumped oil-contaminated waste directly overboard by using a pipe that by-passed the OWS.

On at least one occasion between March 4, 2010, and March 29, 2010, **SIKHARULIDZE** directed subordinate crew members to by-pass the ships' OWS and pump oil-contaminated waste directly overboard. This resulted in approximately 13,200 gallons of oil-contaminated waste to be discharged into the ocean.

"The importance of keeping pollutants out of our natural resources has been realized over the last 30 years and pollution prevention acts, such as the one that has been violated, was put in place to protect these resources. We take violations of these acts very seriously, because we want to ensure that we protect our

natural resources for future generations," stated Mr. Holding.

"As a steward of the environment, the Coast Guard strives to discourage illegal practices such as the Chem Faros' improper handling of oil and oily waste that threaten our maritime resources," said Rear Admiral Wayne E. Justice, Coast Guard 5th District commander. *"The enforcement of pollution prevention laws through diligent investigations in close cooperation with our agency partners, such as the Department of Justice, helps to prevent future violations of this nature."*

At sentencing, **SIKHARULIDZE** faces a maximum statutory penalty of up to six years' imprisonment and/or a fine of up to \$250,000 and up to three years supervised release.

Investigation of this case was conducted by the United States Coast Guard and the Environmental Protection Agency with assistance from the Federal Bureau of Investigation Computer Forensic Team. Assistant United States Attorney Banumathi Rangarajan and Trial Attorney Shenni Patel with the Department of Justice Environmental Crimes Section represented the government.

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