



BALTIMORE BRIDGE COLLAPSES AFTER POWERLESS CARGO SHIP RAMS INTO SUPPORT COLUMN; 6 PRESUMED DEAD - ASSOCIATED PRESS

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A cargo ship lost power and rammed into a major bridge in Baltimore early Tuesday, destroying the span in a matter of seconds and plunging it into the river in a terrifying collapse that could disrupt a vital shipping port for months. Six people were missing and presumed dead, and the search for them was suspended until Wednesday morning.

The ship's crew issued a mayday call moments before the crash took down the Francis Scott Key Bridge, enabling authorities to limit vehicle traffic on the span, Maryland's governor said.

As the vessel neared the bridge, puffs of black smoke could be seen as the lights flickered on and off. It struck one of the bridge's supports, causing the structure to collapse like a toy, and a section of the span came to rest on the bow.

With the ship barreling toward the bridge at "a very, very rapid speed," authorities had just enough time to stop cars from coming over the bridge, Maryland Gov. Wes Moore said.

"These people are heroes," Moore said. "They saved lives last night."

In the evening, Col. Roland L. Butler Jr., superintendent for Maryland State Police, announced that the search and rescue mission was transitioning to one of search and recovery. He also said the search was being put on pause and divers would return to the site at 6 a.m. Wednesday, when challenging overnight conditions were expected to improve. No bodies have been recovered, Butler said.

The crash happened in the middle of the night, long before the busy morning commute on the bridge that stretches 1.6 miles (2.6 kilometers) and was used by 12 million vehicles last year.

The six missing people were part of a construction crew filling potholes on the bridge, said Paul Wiedefeld, the state's transportation secretary.

Guatemala's consulate in Maryland said in a statement that two were Guatemalan citizens working on the bridge. It did not provide their names but said consular officials were in contact with local authorities and assisting the families.

A senior executive at the company that employed the workers also said, in the afternoon, that the workers were presumed dead given the water's depth and how much time had passed.

Jeffrey Pritzker, executive vice president of Brawner Builders, said **th**e crew was working in the middle of the bridge when it came down. "This was so completely unforeseen," Pritzker said. "We don't know what else to say. We take such great pride in safety, and we have cones and signs and lights and barriers and flaggers."

Jesus Campos, who has worked on the bridge for Brawner Builders and knows members of the crew, said he was told they were on a break and some were sitting in their trucks.

"I know that a month ago, I was there, and I know what it feels like when the trailers pass," Campos said. "Imagine knowing that is falling. It is so hard. One would not know what to do."

Father Ako Walker, a Roman Catholic priest at Sacred Heart of Jesus, said he spent time with the families of the missing workers as they waited for news of their loved ones.

"You can see the pain etched on their faces," Walker said.

Rescuers pulled two people out of the water, one of whom was treated at a hospital and discharged hours later. Multiple vehicles also went into the river, although authorities did not believe anyone was inside.

"It looked like something out of an action movie," Baltimore Mayor Brandon Scott said, calling it "an unthinkable tragedy."

A police dispatcher put out a call just before the collapse saying a ship had lost its steering and asked officers to stop all traffic on the bridge, according to Maryland Transportation Authority first responder radio traffic obtained from the Broadcastify.com archive.

One officer who stopped traffic radioed that he was going to drive onto the bridge to alert the construction crew. But seconds later, a frantic officer said: "The whole bridge just fell down. Start, start whoever, everybody ... the whole bridge just collapsed."

On a separate radio channel for maintenance and construction workers, someone said officers were stopping traffic because a ship had lost steering. There was no follow-up order to evacuate, and 30 seconds later the bridge fell and the channel went silent.

From 1960 to 2015, there were 35 major bridge collapses worldwide due to ship or barge collisions, according to the World Association for Waterborne Transport Infrastructure.

Tuesday's collapse is sure to create a logistical nightmare along the East Coast for months, if not years, shutting down ship traffic at the Port of Baltimore, a major hub. The loss of the bridge will also snarl cargo and commuter traffic.

"Losing this bridge will devastate the entire area, as well as the entire East Coast," state Sen. Johnny Ray Salling said.

Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg said at a news conference that it was too soon to estimate how long it will take to clear the channel, which is about 50 feet (15 meters) deep.

"I do not know of a bridge that has been constructed to withstand a direct impact from a vessel of this size," he said.

The Dali, which was headed from Baltimore to Colombo, Sri Lanka and flying under a Singapore flag, is about 985 feet (300 meters) long and about 157 feet (48 meters) wide, according to according to data from Marine Traffic.

Synergy Marine Group, which manages the ship, confirmed that it hit a pillar of the bridge at about 1:30 a.m. while in control of one or more pilots, who are local specialists who help guide vessels safely into and out of ports. The ship is owned by Grace Ocean Private Ltd. Synergy said all crew members and the two pilots on board were accounted for, and there were no reports of any injuries.

The ship was moving at 8 knots, roughly 9 mph (14.8 kph), the governor said.

Inspectors found a problem with the Dali's machinery in June, but a more recent examination did not identify any deficiencies, according to the shipping information system Equasis.

Danish shipping giant Maersk said it had chartered the vessel.

Jagged remnants of the bridge could be seen jutting up from the water in the aftermath of the collapse. The on-ramp ended abruptly where the span once began.

Donald Heinbuch, a retired chief with Baltimore's fire department, said he was startled awake by a deep rumbling that shook his house for several seconds and "felt like an earthquake." He drove to the river's edge and couldn't believe what he saw.

"The ship was there, and the bridge was in the water, like it was blown up," he said.

The bridge spans the Patapsco River at the entrance to the busy harbor, which leads to the Chesapeake Bay and Atlantic Ocean. Opened in 1977, the bridge is named for the writer of "The Star-Spangled Banner."

Wiedefeld said all vessel traffic into and out of the port would be suspended until further notice, though the facility was still open to trucks.

President Joe Biden said he planned to travel to Baltimore and intends for the federal government to pick up the entire cost of rebuilding. "This is going to take some time," Biden said.

Last year the Port of Baltimore handled a record 52.3 million tons of foreign cargo worth \$80 billion, according to the state.

The head of a supply chain management company said Americans should expect shortages of goods from the collapse's effect on ocean container shipping and East Coast trucking.

"It's not just the port of Baltimore that's going to be impacted," said Ryan Petersen, CEO of Flexport.

The collapse, though, is not likely to hurt worldwide trade because Baltimore is not a major port for container vessels. Its facilities are more important when it comes to goods such as farm equipment and autos, said Judah Levine, head of research for global freight booking platform Freightos.

Associated Press journalists around the world contributed to this report, including Sarah Brumfield, Rebecca Santana, Jake Offenhartz, Joshua Goodman, Ben Finley, Claudia Lauer, Brian Witte, Juliet Linderman, David McHugh, John Seewer, Michael Kunzelman and Mike Catalini.