

Safety board: Mariners need better tropical storm forecasts

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Mariners need better tropical weather forecasts, according to federal safety investigators examining the sinking of the cargo ship El Faro.

National Transportation Safety Board recommendations released Thursday stem from the agency's investigation of the El Faro's sinking near the Bahamas in October 2015, as the 790-foot vessel sailed closed to the eye of Hurricane Joaquin.

Noting that Joaquin grew stronger than National Hurricane Center forecasts had indicated and deviated from its expected track, investigators said more improvements in tropical cyclone forecasting were needed.

"As we enter the 2017 [hurricane season](#) we are reminded of the power and devastation associated with these storms," Robert Sumwalt, acting chairman of the safety board, said in a statement. "Storm avoidance is a life-saving skill at sea. And having frequent, up-to-date and reliable weather information is key to effective storm avoidance—and to saving lives."

All 33 sailors aboard died when the El Faro sank after losing propulsion in the hurricane while traveling between Jacksonville and San Juan, Puerto Rico.

Increasing the frequency of [tropical weather](#) advisories and alerts for mariners was among the recommendations made to the National Oceanic

and Atmospheric Administration, the National Weather Service and the Coast Guard.

The safety board expects to complete its investigation later this year. Investigators have not determined a probable cause or contributing factors in the El Faro's sinking, but the safety board decided to make 10 recommendations based on "meteorological facts gathered thus far" and discussions with forecasters and the Coast Guard, according to a report that includes the recommendations.

"We are getting these recommendations out as the hurricane season begins so that the work on these safety improvements can start immediately," said Sumwalt.

Among the safety board's other recommendations: NOAA should develop a plan to improve tropical weather forecast models, the weather service should make changes to ensure mariners receive updated storm forecasts and advisories, and the Coast Guard should work with the [weather service](#) to broadcast forecasts and advisories to mariners.

The [safety](#) board also issued an alert to mariners detailing how to find forecasts and advisories that would help them evaluate the track and intensity of hazardous [weather](#) systems.

The wreckage of the El Faro was found at a depth of about 15,000 feet. Its voyage data recorder was recovered in 2016, including over 20 hours of audio recordings of conversations on El Faro's bridge.

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