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[World News](#)
[Local Sports](#)
[National Sports](#)
[Local Business &
National Business](#)
[News](#)
[Editorial](#)
[Lifestyles &
Entertainment](#)
[Graston's Gallery](#)
[About Windsor](#)
[About The Star](#)
[Weather](#)
[Wheels & Keels](#)

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Questions](#)

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Seaway to reopen

Windoc towed away; questions remain about what happened

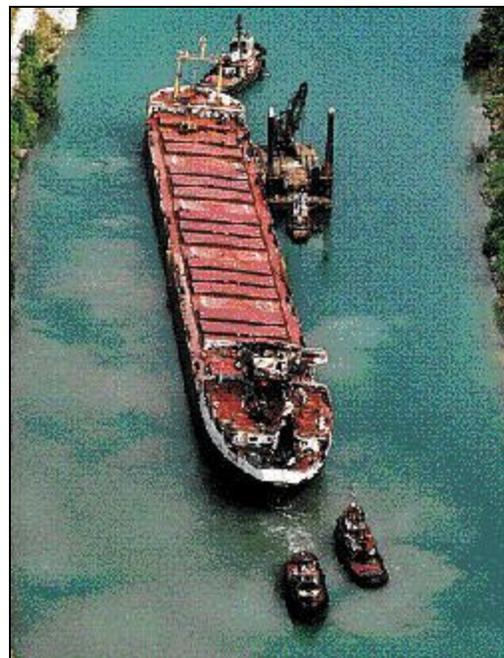
By *Bill Currie and Peter Downs* *The St. Catharines Standard*

The crippled bulk freighter Windoc was towed Monday to a desolate berth behind a paper plant about two km north of the Allanburg bridge that lowered on to the ship Saturday night.

With the help of four tugs, the partially burned-out and grounded N.M. Paterson and Sons Ltd. ship was floated and limped slowly to the west shore of the canal, still listing to port and down a few degrees at the bow where it was holed below the waterline.

Transportation Safety Board of Canada investigators and St. Lawrence Seaway Management Corp. officials continued to probe the cause of the collision, which occurred just before 9 p.m. Saturday. Moments later, a fire in the stern section broke out and burned into Sunday afternoon.

The top of the ship's once majestic stern tower, which was ripped open by the



Several tugs and a barge manoeuvre the listing Windoc a short distance down the Welland Canal, in Thorold Monday. About 25 ships were waiting to clear the canal between Lakes Ontario and Erie after a lift bridge hit the lake freighter Saturday.

collision, had barely cooled from a few hotspots that had flared again into small fires about 6:20 Monday morning. The fires were quickly extinguished by Thorold firefighters.



With its fate still unknown, the hulking ship, its 26,000 tonne cargo of wheat and what was left of its dignity were tied to the edge of the canal, surrounded by tugboats, a salvage vessel and hundreds of spectators who passed on the opposite shore to view the unusual spectacle.

The fire-damaged, listing Windoc was manoeuvred by several tugs a short distance down the Welland Canal Monday to a tieup wall in Thorold. St. Catharines Standard photo: Denis Cahill

Meanwhile, Seaway crews spent the morning and early afternoon trying to determine if the lift bridge could be safely locked into a raised position to allow ship traffic to resume. Authorities said canal operations may begin as early as tonight.

Conducting survey

After the ship was docked, divers hired by the Thunder Bay-based Paterson company began conducting a survey of the forward section of the breached hull.

"Now we've got a good chance to look at her, so in the next couple of days we should get a pretty good report on vessel condition," company vice-chairman Donald C. Paterson said.

Paul Van Den Berg, a senior investigator for the transportation safety board, said his five-member group is looking at operations aboard the Windoc and those of the bridge operator, canal authorities and firefighters.

Van Der Berg confirmed reports that the bridge struck the ship as the Windoc was moving beneath it

The bridge was in motion when it collided with the ship, indicating that the bridge operator would have been inside the bridge's control booth, he said. The bridge operator is able to stop the bridge span in an emergency, but Van Der Berg said he didn't know if that was done.

"We don't know if it was or was not done at this point. We're still gathering information, so it would be impractical for us to speculate at this time."

He said safety board investigators planned to interview the bridge operator Monday afternoon and there is much more information to gather before any conclusions can be made about why the collision occurred or if there were any safety deficiencies.

One of the issues to be investigated is how much time the bridge operator and the vessel's pilot had been on the job that night, including any overtime, the ergonomic status of their work stations and all issues related to humans performing manual tasks.

[Back](#)

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