

HEART OF THE CITY

PIPIN' ON PADDY'S DAY The Gas Men play traditional Irish music featuring jigs, reels, hornpipes and polkas during a St. Patrick's Day Concert at UCSF's Millberry Union Plaza on Monday.

— Cindy Chew/The Examiner

Tell us who is doing positive things: goodtoknow@examiner.com



POLICE BLOTTER

Central

Financial District, Nob Hill, Chinatown, North Beach, Russian Hill, Telegraph Hill



Snatch: Union Square beat officers were in a plainclothes stakeout on a serial thief from a store on Powell Street at noon March 8 when they heard shouts of "Stop, I've been robbed." The officers responded to a physical struggle between two men. The victim said he was walking and counting his money when the suspect ran up and attempted to snatch the cash from his hand.

Bayview

Bayview, Hunters Point



Fashion police: Members of the Bayview plainclothes team were patrolling the area of the Third Street corridor at 6:12 p.m. March 9 in response to an incident that had occurred earlier. As the officers drove on Palou Avenue, they observed a man walking on the opposite side of the street, wearing a waist-length, hooded jacket with his hood up. At the time, it was 65 degrees and sunny. The man walked faster as the officers approached. At one point, officers observed the man bend over behind a parked car and place something on the ground. Officers immediately recognized the object as a gun and attempted to detain the subject. The man ran and an officer followed, catching up to him on McKinnon Avenue. Officers placed the man under arrest.

Richmond

Richmond, most of Golden Gate Park



Unwelcome visitor: Numerous officers responded to a call of a burglary in progress on the 7700 block of Geary Boulevard at 2:22 p.m. March 5. The caller stated that they had found a woman in their home and she had taken a wallet and camera. There had been a struggle when one of the victims tried to detain the suspect, who then fled toward the Walgreens at 43rd Avenue and Point Lobos.

Ingleside

Glen Park, Bernal Heights, Excelsior, St. Francis Wood



Raising cane: Two women argued on a Muni bus on the 400 block of Cortland Avenue at 1:55 p.m. March 7. One hit the other with a cane. The aggressor fled before the police arrived.

TODAY'S TOP STORY » OIL SPILL

Ship's pilot charged with negligence

Cota faces up to 18 months in prison, \$115K fine if convicted on both counts

By John Upton
Examiner Staff Writer

Criminal charges have been filed against the man who piloted a container ship into the Bay Bridge in November resulting in 58,000 gallons of oil spilling into San Francisco Bay — weeks before a scheduled hearing that could assess his claims that faulty navigational equipment contributed to the crash.

The Cosco Busan swiped the bumper on a Bay Bridge support tower in heavy fog Nov. 7, gashing a hole in the hull that released 58,000 gallons of toxic fuel. Area beaches were closed for months and thousands of birds were killed. Crews are still working to remove oil from shorelines around the Bay, according to the lead state cleanup official, Rob Roberts.

Pilot John Cota, of Petaluma, was recently charged with two federal misdemeanor charges of violating federal environmental laws that protect water quality and migratory birds.

The charges carry a maximum penalty of 18 months in jail and \$115,000 in fines, according to court documents. Cota was not taken into custody and will voluntarily appear at court when trial dates are set, his attorney Jeffrey Bornstein said.

The U.S. Attorney's Office in court documents alleged that Cota "negligently" caused oil to spill into the Bay by "failing to pilot a collision-free course," failing to ade-

quately review navigation charts and equipment with the ship's captain and Chinese crew, departing port in heavy fog, failing to proceed at a safe speed despite limited visibility and failing to use the vessel's radar while approaching the Bay Bridge.

Cota told investigators that the navigation equipment was faulty, according to Bornstein.

Bornstein on Monday said that the charges were "premature" because the National Transportation Safety Board hasn't finished its investigation into the incident. "They've decided to criminalize this without allowing the NTSB to really finish its investigative work," he said.

Board spokesman Peter Knudson on Monday said that the equipment manufacturers have been asked to attend a two-day hearing in April to help the agency "gather more information" for its investigation. He said the hearing was designed in part to help determine whether the ship's navigation equipment was working at the time of the collision.

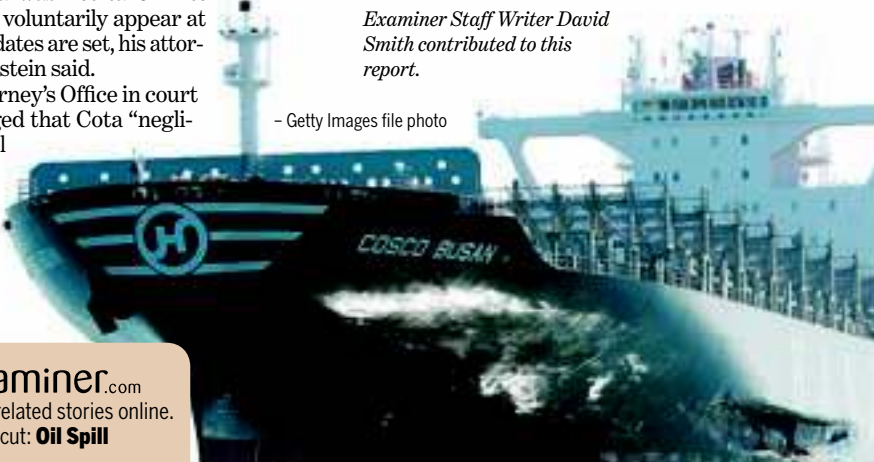
Al Lin, a professor of environmental law at UC Davis who previously practiced environmental law for the Department of Justice, described the charges as "conservative."

Cota hasn't been charged under the Endangered Species Act or Marine Mammal Protection Act — acts that can only be prosecuted if a violation is deliberate, according to Lin. Instead, Cota has been charged with negligence.

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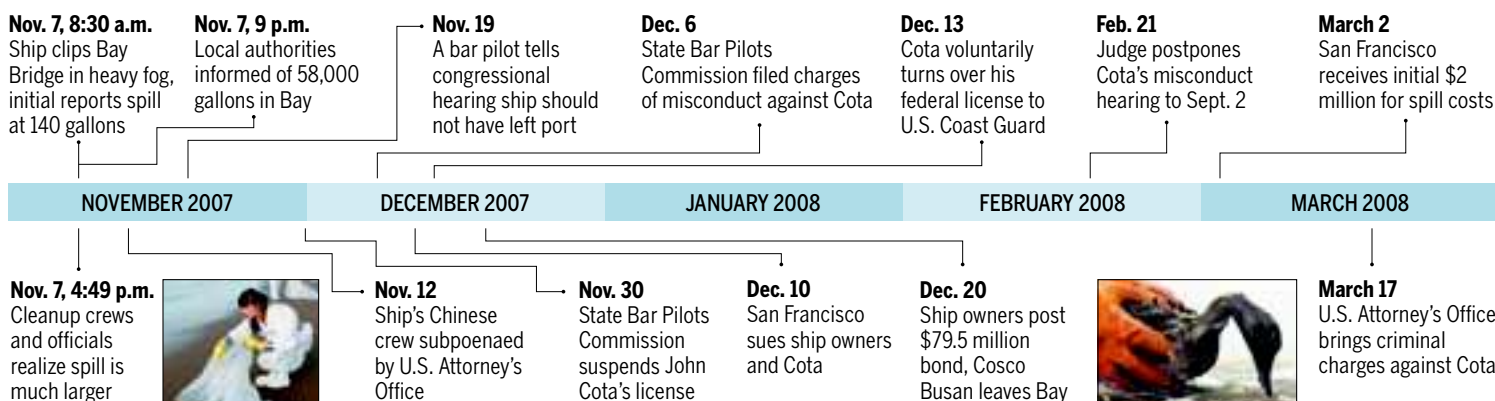
Examiner Staff Writer David Smith contributed to this report.

— Getty Images file photo



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The wake of the Cosco Busan crash



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Six crew members held sans charges

Six members of the Cosco Busan crew have been detained by the U.S. government for more than four months without being charged with a crime.

The Chinese crew, which includes the captain and chief engineer, refused to cooperate with the various incident investigations immediately after the container ship spilled fuel into the Bay, investigators said at the time.

Arex Avanni, chief of Incident Management at the San Francisco sector of the U.S. Coast Guard, told a Feb. 26 Port Commission meeting that the crew was being held "locally."

On Monday, Avanni told The Examiner that the crew members haven't been charged with a crime, but he referred further questions to the U.S. Department of Justice.

Coast Guard Senior Investigating Officer Ross Wheatley said a translator helped him interview the men after the accident, but he said the men are not currently in the custody of the U.S. Coast Guard.

Wheatley also referred further questions to the Justice Department.

A court order has kept the Chinese men in the United States, U.S. Attorney Joseph Russoniello said Monday, adding that the order helped prompt prosecutors to file charges against the ship's pilot on Monday.

Justice Department spokesman Andrew Ames on Monday declined to say where the crew is being held or answer any other questions about the men. "No comment," he wrote in an e-mail in response to questions about the men.

— John Upton