

Owners of Baltimore Bridge Crash Ship Sue Builder Over Alleged Defect

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The owners and managers of the cargo ship involved in the Francis Scott Key Bridge collapse have filed a lawsuit against Hyundai Heavy Industries, alleging that a faulty electrical switchboard designed by the shipbuilder caused the power outage that led to the fatal incident in Baltimore.

On March 26, 2024, the container ship Dali lost power and veered off course, striking a support column of the Key Bridge. The impact brought down a large section of the bridge and killed six construction workers. The disaster also closed the Port of Baltimore for weeks, disrupting commerce and prompting multiple investigations.

In a federal court filing in Pennsylvania, ship owner Grace Ocean Private Ltd. and operator Synergy Marine Group claim that Hyundai's switchboard was improperly designed. According to the complaint, wiring within the system came loose during normal ship operations, leading to a total loss of power and steering control shortly before the collision.

Federal investigators had previously confirmed that the vessel experienced two blackouts before the crash, one just hour earlier and other moments before the bridge strike. The U.S. Department of Justice, which has filed its case against the ship's owners, alleges the vessel was knowingly operated in an unsafe condition, including "jury-rigged" repairs and ignored maintenance issues. The companies recently agreed to pay over \$102 million for debris removal, but that does not cover the projected \$1.7 to \$1.9 billion cost of rebuilding the bridge.

Separately, Maryland state officials face growing scrutiny for not evaluating the bridge's structural vulnerability to vessel strikes, despite decades-old federal recommendations to conduct such assessments. The National Transportation Safety Board found that no formal risk analysis had been conducted for the bridge before the incident. Multiple lawsuits are expected against both public officials and agencies responsible for bridge oversight.

Plans to reconstruct the bridge are already underway. A newly proposed cable-stayed design will include wider lanes and greater navigational clearance. State and federal authorities aim to open the replacement span by 2028.

The ship owners' lawsuit adds a new dimension to the ongoing legal fallout from the bridge collapse, shifting focus toward the ship's original construction. As the investigation continues, attention now turns to the roles of both the manufacturer and the regulators in one of the nation's most significant infrastructure disasters in recent years.