

THE HILL

Cruise line industry defends safety record after accident in Italy

By Keith Laing

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The cruise line industry is defending its safety record after an accident off the coast of Italy killed six people when a ship ran aground.

The Cruise Lines International Association (CLIA), based in Fort Lauderdale, Fla., said the accident that occurred when a Costa Concordia cruise ship reportedly left the water Friday near Italy was a "terrible tragedy" but not a common problem.

"Accidents such as this one are an extremely rare occurrence in the cruise industry, and cruising continues to be one of the safest means of travel among all types of vacationing," the association said Monday in a statement.

"CLIA and all its member cruise lines join with Costa and Carnival in extending our most sincere condolences to all those affected by this terrible tragedy," the statement continued. "We will continue to keep our travel agent members updated as we receive further information."

The owner of the cruise ship, Miami-based Carnival Corporation & plc, said the Costa Concordia hit a rock off the coast of Isola del Giglio. The company said the vessel "sustained significant damage causing the ship to list severely" and added that "the order was given to abandon ship and deploy the lifeboats."

Carnival said in a statement over the weekend that the Costa Concordia accident was "a terrible tragedy and we are deeply saddened.

"Carnival Corporation & plc offers our sympathies and heartfelt condolences to all of the Costa Concordia guests, crew members and their families," the company said. "Carnival Corporation & plc and Costa Cruises are committing our full resources to provide assistance and ensure that all guests and crew are looked after."

Carnival said there were 3,200 people and 1,000 crew members on the Costa Concordia, which the company said was on the first day of a seven-day cruise on the Mediterranean Sea when the accident occurred. The captain of the ship reportedly left the scene of the accident and is being detained by Italian authorities because it is a crime to abandon ship there.

The company said Monday that its priority was "the safety of our passengers and crew" but reported that the Costa Concordia was expected to cost the company \$85 or \$95 million in fiscal 2012.

"A damage assessment review of the vessel is currently being undertaken to determine how long it will be out of service," the company said in a statement. "The vessel is expected to be out of service for the remainder of our current fiscal year if not longer."

Congress passed a law in 2010 dealing with cruise ship safety, but the measure, dubbed the Cruise Vessel Security and Safety Act, focused more on the behavior of passengers aboard ships than the vessels themselves. The law requires cruise lines to provide video surveillance to monitor for crime and provide medical personnel on board to deal with the possibility of sexual assaults.

The law also required cruise ships to be fitted with peep holes in passenger's rooms and side rails that were at least 42 inches high. But it does not address the responsibilities of cruise ship captains when accidents occur.

The sponsor of the bill, California Rep. Doris Matsui (D-Calif.), called the cruise ship measure "a significant milestone for American consumers and the traveling public," when it was signed by President Obama. She has not yet commented publicly on the Costa Concordia accident.