

Sewol ferry sinking case study

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sinking_of_the_MV_Sewol

The **sinking of the MV Sewol** ([Korean](#): 세월호 침몰 사고; [Hanja](#): 世越號沉沒事故)^[6] occurred on 16 April 2014 en route to [Jeju](#) from [Incheon](#). The [South Korean](#) ferry [capsized](#) while carrying 476 people (officially announced number, but actually unknown), mostly [secondary school](#) students from [Danwon High School](#) ([Ansan City](#)).^[7] The 6,825-ton vessel sent a [distress signal](#) from about 2.7 kilometres (1.7 mi) off Gwanmaedo Island at 08:58 [Korea Standard Time](#) (23:58 [UTC](#), 15 April 2014).

Many passengers were rescued by fishing boats and other commercial vessels, which were first on the scene before the arrival approximately 30 minutes later of the [South Korean coast guard](#) and [ROK Navy](#) ships, backed by helicopters.^{[8][9]} There are ongoing recovery efforts by the [South Korean government](#), the [United States Navy](#), civilian groups, and individuals.

The sinking of the *Sewol* has resulted in widespread social and political reaction within South Korea, ranging from criticism of the actions of the captain and most of the crew of the ferry,^[10] to criticism of the ferry operator and the regulators who oversaw its operations,^[11] to criticism of the South Korean government and media for its disaster response and attempts to downplay government culpability.^[12]

The Sewol

MV *Sewol* ([Korean](#): 세월호, [Hanja](#): 世越號, *Beyond the world*^[13]) was built by the Japanese company Hayashikane Shipbuilding & Engineering Co. Ltd. ([Japanese](#): 林兼船渠) in 1994.^[14] At 146 m (479 ft) in length and 22 m (72 ft) in width,^[15] it could carry 921 passengers,^[16] or a total of 956 persons, including her 35 man crew.^[14] It had been reported to have space for 180^[14] or 220 cars^[17] and could carry 152 [twenty-foot shipping containers](#).^[14] The maximum speed of the ship was 22 knots (41 km/h; 25 mph).^[17]

Sewol was originally known as the *Ferry Naminoue* ([Japanese](#): フェリーなみのうえ) between 1994 and 2012, and had been operated in [Japan](#) for 18 years.^{[15][18]} In 2012, the ship was later bought by Cheonghaejin Marine Company, Incheon, renamed *Sewol* and refurbished.^{[19][20]} Modifications included adding extra passenger cabins on the third, fourth, and fifth decks, raising the passenger capacity by 181, and increasing the weight of the ship by 239 tons.^[21] After regulatory and safety checks by the [government of South Korea](#) and the [Korean Register of Shipping](#) (KR), the ship began its operation in South Korea on 15 March 2013.^[21] The ship then made two or three round-trips every week from [Incheon](#) to [Jeju](#).^{[14][19]} It was reported that *Sewol* again passed a vessel safety inspection by the [South Korean Coast Guard](#) two months before the sinking following an intermediate survey to ensure the ship remains in a general condition which satisfies KR's requirements.^{[14][22]}

Prior to the sinking of the Sewol, the worst [ferry disaster in South Korea](#) was in October 1993, when 292 of the 362 passengers on board the [MV Seohae](#) died.^{[23][24]}

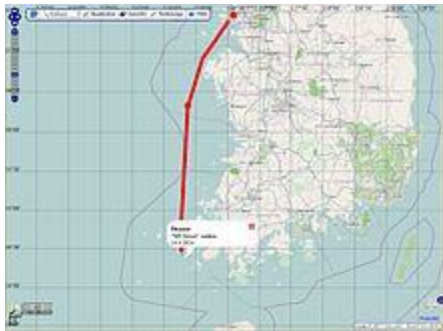
Passengers

The [Ministry of Security and Public Administration](#) vice-minister, Lee Gyeon-og, stated that there were 459 people aboard, the majority of whom were high school students who were on their way to a four-day field trip: 30 crew members, 325 high school students of [Danwon High School](#), 15 school teachers and 89 non-student passengers were aboard the ship.^[4] Other reports put the number of passengers between 450 and 476.^[25]

Conditions

Ocean temperatures in the area where the ship capsized were around 12 °C (54 °F); at that temperature the time before the onset of [hypothermia](#) is approximately 90 minutes.^[26]

Capsizing



Sailing route, Position^[27]

The ship departed Incheon on the evening of 15 April after a two-and-a-half-hour fog delay.^[28] The frequently-traveled 400-kilometre (250 mi) route from Incheon to Jeju usually took 13.5 hours.^[29] On the morning of 16 April the ship began to take on water.^[30] The capsizing began about 25 kilometres (16 mi) off the southwest coast.^[31] While a full scientific accident investigation has yet to be completed, by day two of the incident some officials had attributed the cause to a sharp right turn,^[32] made between 8:48 and 8:49 a.m. ([KST](#)),^[33] that was quickly followed by the initial on-take of water.^[34] At the time of the accident, conditions were calm and the area did not contain rocks or reefs.^[29] Passengers reported feeling a tilt of the ship and hearing a loud 'bang.'^[35]

At the time of the accident, the captain was in his private cabin^[36] and the third mate was at the helm.^[37] The captain is reported to have returned to the bridge and attempted to re-balance the ship immediately after the accident.^[29] At 8:52,^[note 1] a student called the national [emergency service](#) number and was connected to the [Jeollanam-do fire station](#) and reported that the ship was capsizing.^[38] The student was connected to the [Mokpo](#) coast guard and talked for 6 minutes.^[39] The reporting passenger was later found dead.^[40] At 8:55 a.m., the ferry established contact with the Jeju [vessel traffic service](#) (VTS) and asked the Jeju VTS to notify the coast guard that the ship was rolling and in danger.^[41] At 8:56 a.m., the Jeju VTS called the Jeju Coast Guard.^[42] At 8:58 a.m., the Mokpo Coast Guard received the emergency call for the sinking of the ferry made

by the student^[43] and dispatched a patrol vessel.^{[42][note 2]} During this time, the captain told passengers to stay in their rooms.^[44] Passengers were repeatedly ordered not to move over the [intercom](#)^[35] by the communications officer.^[34]

The ship then began communicating with the Jindo VTS, which was closer to its location.^[45] At 9:06 a.m., the Jindo VTS attempted to establish contact with *Sewol*, which it did at 9:07 a.m. At this point, the crew confirmed to VTS that the ferry was capsizing. At 9:14 a.m., the crew stated that the ship's tilting made evacuation impossible. At 9:18 a.m., the crew reported that the ferry had tilted more than 50 degrees to port.^[46] The tilting was later confirmed by the *Central Disaster Countermeasure Headquarters* (중앙재난안전대책본부 or 중앙재난대책안전본부).^[47] At 9:23 a.m., VTS ordered the crew to inform the passengers to wear [personal flotation devices](#). When the crew replied that the broadcasting equipment was out of order, VTS told them to personally order the passengers to wear [life jackets](#) and more clothing.^[46]

At 9:25 a.m., VTS asked the captain to decide quickly whether to evacuate the ship, stating that VTS did not have enough information to make the decision. When the captain inquired about the rescue, VTS replied that [patrol boats](#) were due to arrive in 10 minutes and a [helicopter](#) in one minute. The captain then replied that there were too many passengers for the helicopter.^[46] Around 9:30 a.m., the captain gave orders to evacuate the ship, though the order may not have been relayed to all the passengers.^[33] At 9:33 a.m., after confirming that nearby ships had volunteered to help in the rescue operations, VTS told all ships to drop [lifeboats](#) for the passengers. At 9:38 a.m., all communications were cut off between VTS and the ferry. About three minutes after all communications were cut, about 150 to 160 passengers and crew jumped overboard.^[46]

The ship took two and a half hours to sink.^[48] By around 11:18 a.m., the [bow](#) of the ship was submerged, with a section about 2 metres (6 ft 7 in) high and 20 to 30 metres (66 to 98 ft) long showing above the water. At 9:00 a.m. on 18 April, only 50 centimetres (20 in) of the bow was above water.^[49] As of 1:03 pm, the ship was completely submerged.^[50]

Inside the *Sewol*

During sinking, a teenager victim recorded audio clip inside the ship.^[51] At first, the teenagers were joking, but soon they became suspicious and confused.^[52] Passengers talked to one another, trying to reassure and inform their situation.^[52] The cell phone recorded the announcement "Do not move from your present location and please stay."^[52] The clip also recorded one passenger voice "What's the captain doing?".^[52]

[Text messages](#), [KakaoTalk](#) mobile messages, and photos are believed to be sent by the passengers and crew as the ship sank. The last KakaoTalk message was sent on 10:17 a.m.^[53] Text messages allegedly sent by the passengers of the ship initially circulated in the media,^[54] but an investigation by the Cyber Terror Response Center found that passengers did not use their phones between 12:00 p.m. of 16 April and 10:00 a.m. of 17 April^[55] and that most of the circulating messages were fake.^[56]

Causes

Direct cause

As of 17 April, the ROK Coast Guard has concluded that an "unreasonably sudden turn" to starboard,^[32] made between 8:48 and 8:49 a.m. (KST),^[33] was the cause of the capsizing.^[32] According to the Coast Guard, the sudden turn caused the cargo to shift to the left, causing the ship to experience an incline and to eventually become unmanageable for the crew.^[32] The existence of the sudden turn has been confirmed by the analysis of the ship's [Automatic Identification System](#) data.^[57] The crew of the ferry has agreed that the main cause was the sudden turn.^[58] Experts such as Lee Sang-yun ([Korean](#): 이상윤), a professor and head of the environment/maritime technology institute of the [Pukyong National University](#) has also agreed.^[59]

Overloading and the lack of proper securing of the cargo are also being seen as direct causes.^[60] The MV *Sewol* was carrying 3600 tons of cargo, despite a limit of 987 tons.^[61] The overloading was also previously noted by an off-duty captain and the first mate.^[62] Lee Sang-yun has also proposed overloading as a cause.^[63] According to the captain of the *Sewol*, the ship owners ignored his warning that the ship shouldn't carry too much cargo because it wasn't very stable.^[64]

Secondary causes

Secondary causes have also affected the capsizing of the ferry by decreasing the [restoring force](#).^[65] The crew of the ferry stated that the lack of restoring force was a cause of the disaster.^[58] The *Prosecution/Police Coalition Investigations Headquarters* (검경합동수사본부) is currently investigating about secondary causes which could have lessened the ship's restoring force.^[66]

The renovations of adding extra passenger cabins have been proposed as a main secondary cause by Kim Gill-soo ([Korean](#): 김길수), professor of maritime transport technological department in the [Korea Maritime University](#).^{[21][67]} This possible cause has also been supported by the captain^[68] as well as Lee Sang-yun ([Korean](#): 이상윤).^[59]

South Korean newspaper [The Chosun Ilbo](#) argued that the discharging of the ballast water was a cause of the incident.^[69] Before the incident, the [Korean Register of Shipping](#) stated that the *Sewol* needed to carry more than 2,000 tons of [ballast water](#).^[70]

Obsolete theories

Explosion


Gong Gil-young ([Korean](#): 공길영), a professor of aviation engineering in the [Korea Maritime University](#), has commented that the sudden turn was simply the 'first cause' and that there were secondary causes to the incident. He advocated an explosion as the most probable secondary cause.^{[71][72]}

Reef collision

At the beginning of the investigation, the ROK Coast Guard thought that the cause was a collision with a reef, believing this likely because the area was foggy.^[73] The captain denied this was the cause of the accident,^[74] and a reef collision has been dismissed as a cause by consensus among experts.^[75] The theory is also not currently advocated by the Coast Guard.^[32]

Rescue operations



 Sewol capsizing at 10:00 a.m. (KST) on 16 April 2014.

First day

At 8:58 a.m. (KST) on 16 April 2014, units from the [ROK Navy](#) were sent to help in the rescue effort.^[76] At 9:04 a.m., the *Central Disaster Countermeasure Headquarters* (중앙재난안전대책본부 or 중앙재난대책안전본부) was created by the [government of South Korea](#). At 9:10 a.m., a rescue operations headquarters was set up in the [South Korean Coast Guard](#).^[77] At 9:35 a.m., The [Korean Ministry of National Defense](#) started operating *Counter-disaster Headquarters* (재난대책본부).^[78] At 9:40 a.m., the [Ministry of Oceans and Fisheries](#) declared the accident to be the highest state of emergency in terms of naval accidents; consequently, the *Central Accident Response Headquarters* (중앙사고수습본부) was established.^[79] At the same time, the [Ministry of Health and Welfare](#) sent emergency vehicles and the first squad of the *Disaster Medical Support Team* (재난의료지원팀) to Jindo.^[80] At 11:28 a.m., the Korea Navy's Ship Salvage Unit (SSU) was reported to have been deployed for the operations.^[81]

at 2:42 pm, 150 special force units from the [ROK Army Special Warfare Command](#), including 40 [scuba divers](#) has been sent for the operations. At this point, 196 units, including 82 in the SSU and 114 in the [ROK Naval Special Warfare Flotilla](#) has been confirmed to be involved in the operations.^[82] On 3:07, the regional government of the [Gyeonggi Province](#) was reported to have started operating the *Prevention and Countermeasures Headquarters* (재난안전대책본부).^[83] After 5 pm, units from the SSU began undersea operations.^[84] On 5:13, the Gyeonggi-do Office of Education was reported to have started operating the *Ansan Danwon High School Accident Countermeasures Report Compiling Headquarters* (안산 단원고 사고대책 종합상황본부).^[85] at 8:00, operations investigating the ship's hull was ceased.^[86]

As of 22:03 KST, the following units were involved in rescue operations. Naval forces include sailors from the 3rd Fleet (제 3 함대; 第三艦隊), a [Dokdo-class amphibious assault ship](#), a [Chungmugong Yi Sun-sin-class destroyer](#), and an [Ulsan-class frigate](#). The [ROK Air Force](#) sent support units such as the [Lockheed C-130 Hercules](#), [Sikorsky HH-60 Pave Hawk](#), and [HH-47 variant of the Boeing CH-47 Chinook](#). The [ROK Army](#) sent units including 150 [Special Warfare Command](#) soldiers and 11 ambulances.^[87]

Second day



A U.S. Navy [MH-60S Seahawk helicopter](#) conducted search and rescue operations at the request of the South Korean navy near where the *Sewol* sank, on 17 April 2014.

On 0:30 a.m. (KST), hull investigations were started by the ROK Coast Guard with the help of [flares](#).^[88] As of 6:00 a.m. (KST), 171 ships, 29 aircraft and 30 divers were involved in the rescue effort. The Korea Coast Guard had assigned 20 divers in teams of two. The ROK Navy had also assigned 8 divers.^[89] On 7:24 a.m., civilian groups of expert divers were reported to be helping out in the rescue operations.^[90] Starting around 2:00 pm, rescue operations were practically stopped due to bad weather conditions.^[91] By 3:32 pm KST, the number of divers had increased to 55.^{[92][93]}

Subsequent operations

On 18 April, 03:00 a.m. (KST), cranes began arriving on the accident scene.^[94] On 10:05 a.m.,^[95] divers had entered the capsized ship's hull despite strong tides, darkness and presence of [silt](#) in water,^[96] but they could not reach the passenger area.^[97] On 10:50 a.m., the ROK Coast Guard began to be pumping in air^[95] to support possible air pockets.^[34] The divers' entrance has been later labeled a 'failure' by the *Central Disaster Countermeasure Headquarters*.^[98]

On 19 April, 5:40 a.m. (KST) three bodies were recovered by divers, the first from the passenger cabins on the fourth deck of the ship.^[99] On April 21 [remotely operated underwater vehicle](#) unmanned robots (such as the Crabster) began to be used for operations.^[100]

On 6 May, an Undine Marine Industries veteran diver died while searching for bodies at a depth of 25 meters.^[101] He became the first victim among scores of mobilized divers at a ferry disaster site.^{[101][102]} In spite of the death, divers continued their searches.^[102]

Survivors

Initial reports stated that rescuers retrieved 368 people from cold waters as the passengers, mostly school students, had jumped overboard when the vessel started sinking, but the South Korean government later corrected this statement, saying 295 passengers remained missing.^[103] 22 of the 29 crew survived, including 15 responsible for the navigation.^[104]

Early in the rescue efforts, a 27-year-old female crew member was found dead inside the sinking vessel and a male high school student died shortly after arriving at a hospital.^{[105][106]}

In its 17 April morning edition, *The Chosun Ilbo* reported that 174 people had been rescued, 4 had died, and 284 were missing.^[107] According to [CNN](#) and its affiliate [YTN](#), six people died.^[5] News1 Korea reported that, as of 8:00 a.m. (KST) on 17 April, 179 people had been rescued, 6 had died and 290 were missing.^[89] Three more people were found dead at 11:00 a.m. (KST) and the confirmed death toll rose to 9.^[108] At 10 pm KST, [Yonhap news](#) confirmed that the death toll had risen to 14.^[109] By the morning of 18 April, the death toll had risen to 28.^[110] On 19 April, the death toll rose to 36.^[111] By 20 April, the death toll reached 49.^{[112][113]} By 6 May, a diver searching the sunken ferry had died; not including the diver, the death toll in the ferry disaster has risen to 264, with 38 people still missing.^[114] By 10 May 2014, the death toll has gone up to 275, with dozens more still missing.^[115]

Foreign response



U.S. Marines assigned to the [31st Marine Expeditionary Unit](#) responding to the scene of the *Sewol* sinking on 16 April 2014.

- The American [warship USS Bonhomme Richard \(LHD-6\)](#) and its helicopters assisted in the [air-sea rescue](#) operation.^{[116][117]} But the rescue helicopter did not get the approval of the South Korean navy, so it could not participate in the rescue.^[118] [USNS Safeguard \(T-ARS-50\)](#) was sent to South Korea to take part in the rescue operation.^{[119][120]}
- The [Japan Coast Guard](#) offered support with a message of sympathy and condolences from the [Japanese government](#), but the South Korean Coast Guard declined the offer, saying that while the offer was welcome, special assistance was not needed on this occasion.^[121]

Investigation

Captain and crew

The captain of the ferry, Lee Jun-Seok, had abandoned the ship with passengers still aboard the ferry.^[122] He was among the first to be rescued.^[123] The video of the captain getting to safety has been released^[124] by the ROK Coast Guard.^[125] Lee was condemned by maritime experts for his action, frequently being compared to Francesco Schettino, captain during the [Costa Concordia disaster](#). South Korean law explicitly requires captains to remain on the ship during a disaster.^{[126][127]} Prosecutors sought to arrest Lee after state prosecutor Park Jae-eok said that he was not present in charge of the ship at the time of the incidents and that the third mate was at

the helm.^{[128][129]} Others arrested with Lee were a helmsman and the third officer. Two days later, four more men were also arrested. South Korean President Park Geun-hye said that the behavior of the captain and some of the crew was "utterly incomprehensible, unacceptable and tantamount to murder" and that it was "utterly unimaginable, legally and ethically." Lee Ju-young, the minister for maritime policies, was heckled when meeting family members of victims.^[130] As of 25 April, all the surviving crew members were in state custody.^[131]

Regulation

The disaster raised questions about the regulation of shipping in South Korea. Shipping there is regulated by the [Korean Shipping Association](#), which is also an industry trade group, which experts consider a likely [conflict of interest](#). In addition, government regulators outside the Association frequently move to jobs as part of the association after their government service. Yun Jong-hwui, a professor at Korea Maritime and Ocean University notes that while South Korean regulations are strong, they are often poorly enforced.^[132]

Reactions



A memorial wall near the [Danwon High School](#), where most of the victims were from



A memorial ceremony in [Hwarang Public Garden](#), a park near the Danwon High School

Political

In addition to reaction against the actions of the captain and much of the crew of the *Sewol* ferry,^[133] there has been a much wider political reaction to the disaster. Criticism has ranged from anger at the lax regulatory environment which may have contributed to the safety violations

that could have sunk the Sewol,^[134] to anger about the rescue operations,^[135] to anger at [Park Geun-hye](#), the [President of South Korea](#), whose approval ratings have fallen from a high of 71 percent before the disaster to "the 40 percent range" weeks afterwards.^[136]

Political reaction to the *Sewol* sinking has been intensified by a series of events. A prominent South Korean politician from the ruling [Saenuri Party](#), [Chung Mong-joon](#), was forced to apologize when his son wrote a controversial Facebook post criticizing the public for criticizing the government over the disaster.^[137] Many parents of the victims of the tragedy have been expressing deep anger at the government, ranging from reportedly berating Prime Minister [Jung Hong-won](#)^[138] to shouting at President [Park Geun-hye](#),^[139] to parents staging protests at the presidential palace itself, partly inflamed by a reported remark by a senior news editor at the government-influenced [Korean Broadcasting System](#) that the number of dead in the ferry tragedy was "not many, compared with the number of people killed in traffic accidents each year".^[140]

[Barack Obama](#), the [President of the United States](#), sent his condolences and stated that the United States would help in the search for survivors.^[141] [Truong Tan Sang](#), the president of [Vietnam](#), as well as the [deputy prime minister](#) and the minister of foreign affairs sent their condolences to [Yun Byung-se](#), South Korea's Minister of Foreign Affairs.^[142] [Singapore](#)'s Prime Minister [Lee Hsien Loong](#) sent their condolences to the president of [South Korea](#).^[143] [Xi Jinping](#), the [President of China](#), sent messages on condolences to Park.^{[144][145]}

On April 27, [Jung Hong-won](#), the prime minister of South Korea, accepted responsibility and announced his resignation.^[146]

On 29 April, South Korean president [Park Geun-hye](#) indirectly apologized for the government's response to ferry sinking.^{[147][148][149]} On April 30, [North Korea](#) sent its condolences.^[150]

Civilian

On April 17, a representative of the Cheonghaejin Marine Company apologized for the incident.^[151] The chairman and CEO of Korean Register of Shipping, Chon Young-Kee, resigned on 28 April, following raids on KR offices by South Korean prosecutors.^[152]

On April 18, Kang Min-kyu, 52, the vice principal of the [Danwon High School](#) which many of the victims attended, rescued from the ship, was found [hanging](#) from a tree in [Jindo](#), near the gymnasium where relatives of the victims were camped. Police stated that he used his belt to hang himself and a note was found in his wallet.^[153] According to the two-page note, he had organized the field trip that had brought the high school party aboard the ship. "Surviving alone is too painful when 200 lives are unaccounted for... I take full responsibility."^{[129][154]} The note ended with a request that his body be cremated and the ashes scattered over the site of the accident, "that I might be a teacher in heaven to those kids whose bodies have not been found."^[155]

On April 22, a [netizen](#) made a post encouraging others to take part in the 'KakaoTalk yellow ribbon wearing campaign.' The image posted with the post had a caption stating 'One small movement, big miracles'^{[156][157]} Since then, the yellow ribbon has gained meaning to symbolize

mourning.^[158] The ribbons are prominent in the social media, sometimes as profile photos.^[159] Celebrities such as [Jo Kwon](#) and [Hye-rim Park](#) had joined this movement.^[157]

On May 8, the chief executive of Cheonghaejin Marine Company, the ferry operator, was arrested and is facing charges including causing death by negligence.^[160]

On May 13, prosecutors summoned Yoo Byung-eun, the owner of MV Sewol's operator, Chonghaejin Marine to probe charges including embezzlement, dereliction of duty, tax evasion and bribery.^[161]

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