



香港商船資訊

HONG KONG MERCHANT SHIPPING INFORMATION NOTE

Loss of two Lives Resulting from Inadvertent Release of a Lifeboat

To: Shipowners, ship managers, ship operators, masters, officers and crew

Summary

A recent accident on a Hong Kong registered general cargo ship involving inadvertent release of a lifeboat resulted in loss of two lives. This information note draws the attention of the shore management and shipboard staff to the importance of adequate familiarization training, knowledge on the operating principle, safety instructions and warning for the on-load release mechanism of lifeboats.

The Incident

1. In February 2003 a Hong Kong registered general cargo ship collided with another vessel in the Inland Sea of Japan. As the ship sustained hull damage and developed a list to starboard, the master ordered to lower the lifeboats to the embarkation deck level for emergency use. However, during the lowering of the port lifeboat, the forward and aft lifting hooks suddenly released from the secured position and the lifeboat dropped 15 metres into the sea. Two crewmembers were later found dead inside the recovered lifeboat.

2. The investigation into the lifeboat incident revealed that the concerned lifeboat was fitted with an on-load release mechanism that would enable simultaneous release of the hooks from the falls while the lifeboat was either fully waterborne (off-load) or fully suspended on the hooks (on-load). While the primary cause of the lifeboat incident is believed to be the inadvertent release of the on-load release mechanism by a person inside the lifeboat, the investigation has identified several contributory deficiencies mentioned hereunder:

- (a) Crewmembers were not fully conversant with the operation of the on-load release mechanism and its associated danger if it is released accidentally or prematurely.
- (b) The operating instructions and safety warning for the on-load release mechanism displayed in the lifeboat were not clear and not written in a language that was fully understood by all the crewmembers.

- (c) No technical manual was available on board to enable the crewmembers to have detailed information on the operation and maintenance of the on-load release mechanism.
- (d) A stopper of inadequate design was provided as the mechanical securing device for the on-load release lever for the lifeboats. This securing device was not strong enough to prevent the lever from accidental triggering.
- (e) Although there had been procedures in the ISM system for lowering and boarding of lifeboats, such procedures did not adequately address all the contingencies in an emergency situation, e.g. when some of the crew assigned to stations for the launching of lifeboats were engaged in other emergency duties.

Lessons

3. In summary, the lessons learnt from the incident are as follows:

- (a) Crewmembers responsible for the launching and recovery of lifeboats fitted with on-load release mechanism must have a good knowledge on the principle of operation of the mechanism in order that they can launch and recover the lifeboats safely. Adequate familiarization training, detailed technical information and operating procedures for the particular type of on-load release mechanism should be provided to the concerned crewmembers to ensure that they are fully conversant with the safe operation of the mechanism. The crewmembers should be aware of the dangerous consequence should the on-load release mechanism be operated incorrectly.
- (b) Clear operating instructions and conspicuous warning notice for the lifeboat on-load release mechanism should be displayed adjacent to the release lever inside the lifeboat. Such operating instructions and warning notice should be written in a language well understood by the crew.
- (c) The on load release lever should be properly secured to prevent inadvertent release.
- (d) The abandon ship procedures should ensure that stations required for lifeboat launching operations during a real emergency situation is adequately manned. Such procedures should be incorporated in the ship's ISM manual and drills should be conducted accordingly to evaluate effectiveness.

4. The attention of shipowners, ship managers, ship operators, masters, officers and crew is drawn on the lessons learnt above.