



香 港 商 船 資 訊

HONG KONG MERCHANT SHIPPING INFORMATION NOTE

Fatal Accident while boarding vessel by pilot ladder

To : Shipowners, Ship Managers, Ship Operators, Masters and Officers

Summary

The relieving Chief Engineer of a Hong Kong registered bulk carrier fell into the water and drowned while he was boarding the vessel by means of the pilot ladder. This information note draws the attention of Shipowners, Ship Managers, Ship Operators, Masters, Officers and Crew to the lessons learnt from this accident.

The Accident

1. A Hong Kong registered bulk carrier was at anchor in light ship condition with high freeboard for crew repatriation. The relieving Chief Engineer (C/E), who had injected a dose of insulin about 1 hour before the accident and arrived at the ship's side after about 14 hours of transportation, fell into the water when he was climbing the pilot ladder to board the vessel. He was retrieved from the water to the service launch by the joint effort of the launch attendant and the ship's crew in about 10 minutes. Despite first aid treatment and cardiopulmonary resuscitation applied to him on the launch as well as emergency treatment in the hospital, he was certified dead afterwards.
2. At the time of the accident, the weather was fine. The wind was light air and the sea was calm.
3. The investigation revealed that the physical condition of the C/E might have deteriorated at the time of the accident due to tiredness and the effect of medical injection. As a result, the C/E could not hold himself onto the ladder, fell from the ladder directly into the water and drowned. He might have under-estimated the physical strength required for him to climb a vertical height of about 9 metres up the ladder to board the vessel. He probably thought that he could manage and did not request the Master for alternative boarding arrangement.
4. The C/E was found to have a medical history of diabetes and some chronic illness such as hypertension and kidney problem. He was prescribed to take medication life long without skipping with a number of items of medicines. However, no relevant remarks/restrictions were endorsed in his medical examination report/Medical Fitness Certificate to reflect clearly his health conditions to the ship's Management Company.

Lessons Learnt

5. To avoid recurrence of similar accident, it is important that:
 - Seafarers should assess their own health and/or physical condition whether they are capable of, in similar cases, climbing a vertical height of about 9 metres up the pilot ladder to board the vessel. Should they feel not confident, they should inform and request the Master for alternative boarding arrangement.
 - Seafarers should properly communicate their health condition and prescribed medication, if any, to the examining doctor such that their health condition could be properly assessed and reflected in the medical examination report and/or Medical Fitness Certificate for the Management Company to consider the appropriate arrangement required.
6. The attention of Shipowners, Ship Managers, Ship Operators, Masters, Officers and Crew is drawn to the lessons learnt above.

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