

MARINE DEPARTMENT NOTICE NO. 37 OF 2003

(Navigational and Seamanship Safety Practices)

Notice to Owners, Operators, Masters and Persons-in-charge of Locally Licensed Vessels – Importance of Communication between Crewmembers

The Accident

A fatal accident happened on 14 October 2002 in that a crewmember died after falling overboard from a locally licensed cargo vessel which was underway in hours of darkness. In the incident there were only two crewmembers on board. The master was steering the vessel and the other crewmember, who was initially staying with the master in the wheelhouse, left the master and went aft during the passage. About an hour had lapsed and upon the vessel's arrival at its destination, the master became aware that the crewmember had gone missing. He searched the vessel and the sea areas along the route the vessel had just taken but was unable to locate the crewmember. Two days later the body of the missing crewmember was found in the nearby sea area.

2. The master did not know exactly when and how the deceased had fallen overboard. The deceased gave no indication of his intention before leaving the wheelhouse. He was not seen thereafter and there was no attempt to communicate between the master and the crewmember throughout the rest of the voyage.

Lesson Learnt

3. This incident illustrates the importance of communication between crewmembers, especially when there are only two members on board a vessel. If there is a need for activities that require to be out of sight of one another, both crewmembers should know what each other is doing and periodical contact should be maintained so that should any mishap occur to one of them, the other could be aware of the occurrence and take necessary actions without delay.

4. Owners, operators, masters and persons-in-charge of the locally licensed vessels are requested to take note of the above-mentioned accident and the lesson learnt, and to take appropriate steps to enhance communication between

crewmembers engaging in activities at separate locations alone, in order to avoid reoccurrence of similar accidents.

(S.Y. TSUI)
Director of Marine

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