

MARINE DEPARTMENT NOTICE NO. 151 OF 2003

(Cargo Handling Safety)

Avoidance of Excessive Hours of Work

Fatigue can be a major cause of accidents involving cargo handling in the mid-stream of Hong Kong. In two recent accidents fatigue played a key role leading to loss of life in one case and permanent disability in the other. The two victims had been working for extended periods of 21 hours and 54 hours respectively, with rest breaks totalling less than 3 hours.

Fatigue develops gradually and insidiously. It leads to loss of concentration, impaired judgment and irrational behaviour. There are frequently no observable symptoms by the victim himself or the onlooker. It nevertheless drastically reduces the victim's sensitiveness to potential dangers.

At the death inquest into a recent accident resulting in the death of a stevedoring worker engaged in mid-stream container handling operations on board a vessel, the Coroner has recommended that when engaged in such operations :

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- (i) a work shift should never exceed 12 hours; and
- (ii) a rest break of minimum half hour should be provided after every 6 hours of working schedule.

It is the responsibility of employers and the persons-in-charge of works to ensure safe working conditions at a workplace. Stevedoring companies, employers and persons-in-charge should consider applying the above recommendations with regard to all cargo operations in the waters of Hong Kong, particularly in mid-stream where cargo operations are relatively more hazardous. It is further recommended that written records of work shift and working periods are maintained which should be duly signed by the employer or the person-in-charge of works, and the stevedoring worker.

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Director of Marine

Marine Department
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