

MARINE DEPARTMENT NOTICE NO. 167 OF 2004

(Navigational and Seamanship Safety Practices)

Notice to Owners, Operators, Masters and Persons -in-charge of Locally Licensed Vessels – Fire during Bunkering

The Accident

On 11 July 2004, a fire broke out in the engine room of a locally licensed wooden fishing vessel while it was taking bunkers from an oil barge in the waters near Tung Lung Chau. The fire spread rapidly and went out of control. Of the three crew on board, the Master and the sailor managed to escape to the bunker barge but the Engineer was killed by the fire. The fire was later extinguished by Fire Services launches after the vessel drifted and grounded at Luk Keng Wan.

2. Investigation into the accident revealed that the fire was caused by faulty bunkering procedures which resulted in the premature discharge of fuel from the bunker hose. It is believed this was due to the sudden starting of the fuel supply pump on the barge before the hose was properly connected to the fuel filling pipe in the engine room casing of the fishing vessel. As a result, fuel was sprayed onto the hot surfaces of the engine exhaust pipes lying in the vicinity of the fuel filling point, causing the fire to initiate.

3. The investigation has also identified the following contributory factors to the cause of the fire:

- (a) the bunkering operation was carried out with a lack of coordination or erroneous communication between the personnel on board the oil barge and the fishing vessel;
- (b) instead of using the designed fuel filling points on deck of the fishing vessel, a fuel tank pipe inside the engine room casing was used for the bunker operation;
- (c) the main engine was kept running at idling speed during the bunker operation while the insulation lagging of the exhaust pipes in the engine room casing was improperly maintained; and
- (d) the Master was not qualified to take charge of the fishing vessel and had paid little attention to the bunkering operation.

Lessons Learnt

4. Important lessons should be learnt from this incident :
 - (a) When carrying out bunkering operation on board vessels, there must be proper coordination and effective communication between the parties involved to ensure the fuel hose has been properly connected prior to starting of fuel supply pump. Persons in charge of the vessels should closely supervise their crewmembers to ensure the bunkering operation is safely carried out.
 - (b) It is important that only proper filling points should be used for the fuel filling process on board vessels. No fuel filling points should be installed in the potentially fire hazardous area such as the engine room.
 - (c) Machinery and equipment should be properly maintained and those not essential for fuel filling process should be shut down during the bunkering operation to minimize fire risk.

5. Owners, operators, masters and persons-in-charge of the locally licensed vessels are requested to take note of the above-mentioned accident and the lessons learnt.

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