

Marine Department Notice No. 80 of 2006

(Statutory Requirements and Related Information)

Safe Loading of Fluorspar Cargo

On 20 May 2005, a Hong Kong registered ship capsized and sank in the waters east of Sri Lanka. Investigation into the incident revealed that the probable cause of the incident was liquefaction of the fluorspar cargo inside the cargo holds. The shift of unstable and semi-liquefied fluorspar cargo in the hold is believed to have caused a list to the vessel during the sea passage which progressively increased causing the vessel to capsize and sink.

2. The fluorspar cargo was loaded in Hong Kong. The shipper failed to provide the Transportable Moisture Limit (TML) of the fluorspar cargo to the Master before shipment as required by the Merchant Shipping (Safety) (Carriage of Cargoes) Regulation and the Code of Safe Practice for Solid Bulk Cargoes (BC Code). In this incident a 10% TML for bulk fluorspar had been used by the shipper without documentation support from any laboratory and accepted by the Master.

3. Section 3 of the Merchant Shipping (Safety) (Carriage of Cargoes) Regulation (Cap. 369) stipulates that the owner or master of a ship shall not accept for carriage any cargo unless the shipper has furnished with information on the TML and moisture content of the cargo. The master or owner of a ship shall not accept for carriage by the ship any cargo that may liquefy when carried by sea unless the actual moisture content of such cargo is less than its TML.

4. Even when the shipper has furnished the information on the TML and moisture content of the cargo, if the master has doubts in regard to the appearance or condition of the material, a simplified in-situ testing method to provide a rough idea on the possibility of flow may be carried out by half filling a cylindrical vessel of about 1 litre capacity with a sample of the cargo and striking it against a hard surface at least 25 times. If free moisture appears on the surface of the sample, additional laboratory tests should be conducted.

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