

**Marine Department Notice No. 20 of 1999**  
**(Navigational & Seamanship Safety Practices)**

**DANGERS IN THE USE OF VHF RADIO IN COLLISION AVOIDANCE**

All ship masters, pilots and persons-in-charge of vessels are hereby reminded to exercise extreme caution when using VHF radio for collision avoidance.

2. Recently a collision occurred within Hong Kong during the day time and in good visibility. Subsequent investigation revealed that the accident was caused by mis-communication between the concerned vessels over the VHF. It started as vessel A tried to call vessel B on the VHF radio to propose certain collision avoidance action. A third vessel in the area overheard the call, having mistaken that the message was directed to her, replied to vessel A and agreed to take such action which was not intended for her. Without further verifying each other's identification or confirming the intention, both vessels carried out what was believed to have been agreed upon and eventually ended up in a collision.
3. The above incident once again has shown that the use of VHF in collision avoidance is not always helpful and may even be dangerous. Misunderstanding can arise over the identification of vessels or the interpretation of the message received. The identification of vessels becomes more difficult during night time, in restricted visibility or when there are more than two vessels in the vicinity. Busy radio traffic and static noises can also prevent timely reception of the message and lead to wrong identification or misunderstanding.
4. At times even if positive identification has been achieved there is still the possibility of misunderstanding between the vessels concerned due to language difference, imprecise or ambiguous expressions being used. Besides, manoeuvre action agreed between two vessels which does not comply with the Collision Regulations may have adverse effects on the third or other vessels in the vicinity. This can lead to a collision or disastrous result which it was intended to avoid.
5. While VHF is so commonly used today for bridge to bridge communication, it is important that all masters and persons in charge of the navigation of their vessels should always bear in mind the risks which may be involved when using the VHF as a collision

/...

avoidance aid, as described above. In all circumstances, the International Regulations for Preventing Collisions at Sea, 1972, must be observed and complied with.

6. This Notice supplements Marine Department Notice No. 106 of 1988.

**S. Y. TSUI**  
**Director of Marine**

Marine Department  
Government of the HKSAR

Date: 12 February 1999.

Action File Ref. : PA/S/VTC 902/98/39