

Fire aboard the Locally Licensed Fishing Vessel “M63815A” in the waters near Tung Lung Chau at about 1500 hours on 11 July 2004

1. The Incident

1.1 At about 1500 hours on 11 July 2004, a fire broke out in the engine room of the locally licensed wooden fishing vessel “M63815A ” while it was, most probably, taking bunker from an oil barge in the waters near Tung Lung Chau. The fire spread rapidly and went out of control. The Master and the sailor managed to escape the fire and later boarded the oil barge. However, the Engineer was killed during the fire. The fire was later extinguished by the fire services launches after the vessel drifted and grounded at Luk Keng Wan (Fig. 1).

2. Findings

2.1 The investigation has identified the most probable cause of the fire on the vessel was attributed to the faulty bunkering operation during which fuel was prematurely discharged from the bunker hose, probably due to unexpected 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 vessel. As a result, fuel was sprayed onto the hot surfaces of the exhaust pipes lying in the vicinity of the fuel filling point, causing the fire to initiate.

2.2 The investigation has also identified the following factors contributing to 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 vessel. As a result, pumping of fuel was started prior to the fuel hose having been properly rigged and secured to the filling point.
- (b) The designed fuel filling points on deck of the vessel was not used. Instead bunkering was carried out via a fuel tank pipe in the potentially fire hazardous area, namely, inside the engine room casing of the vessel (Fig. 2).
- (c) The exhaust pipes in the engine room casing were improperly maintained. The incomplete insulation laggings had led to exposure of hot surface which ignited the fuel sprayed on it during the faulty bunker operation.
- (d) The Master was not qualified to take charge of the vessel and had paid little attention to the bunkering operation. He had also allowed the use of improper fuel filling point and failed to maintain the exhaust pipes properly. All these indicates that the vessel had failed to comply with Section 28(2) of the Shipping and Port Control Ordinance,

Cap 313, in that it had been operating in an unsafe condition.

3. The Lessons

3.1 Important lessons should be learnt from this incident :-

- (a) In carrying out bunkering operation on board there must be proper coordination and effective communication between the parties involved ;
- (b) It is important that only proper filling points should be used for the fuel filling process on board ;
- (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.



Fig. 1

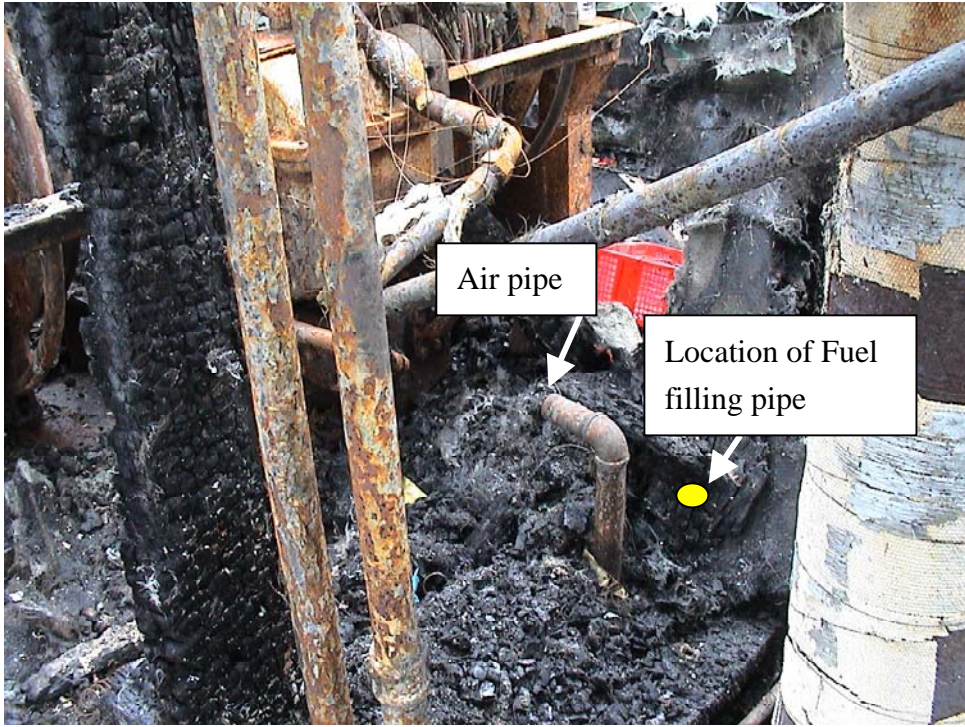


Fig. 2