

Man-overboard accident during a lifeboat drill onboard the Hong Kong Registered Containership “Blue Ocean” on 19 May 2008

1. The incident

- 1.1 An accident happened on board a Hong Kong registered ship in a lifeboat drill carried out during the ship’s voyage. In the incident, the Third Officer, who had three months’ experience in the rank, and a seaman were sent on board the lifeboat to operate the remote control cable for lowering the boat. During the lowering operation, the boat swung out and was stuck. While they were attempting to lower the boat further by pulling the cable together, she suddenly descended quickly and plunged into the water. Water rushed into the boat and flushed the Third Officer out into the sea. A search and rescue operation was conducted, the seaman inside the lifeboat was rescued but the Third Officer was missing.
- 1.2 The investigation revealed that the main contributing factor to the accident was the improper maintenance and operation of the remote control mechanism for lowering the lifeboat. Other factors were that the Master of the vessel did not assess the risk and organize the drill properly; and the newly joined Third Officer was not familiar with the operation of the remote control system for lowering the lifeboat and no guidance was given to him before the drill.

2. Lessons Learnt

- 2.1 To avoid recurrence of similar accidents, the attention of owners and masters of all vessels are drawn to the following important advice:
 - Lifeboat equipment and the associated operating systems must be properly maintained and operated at all times in accordance with manufacturers’ instructions;
 - Lifeboat drills must be carried out cautiously at all times in strict compliance with the relevant safety instructions and guidelines; and
 - Newly joined and/or inexperienced officers onboard ships should be properly guided when they are assigned to work on lifeboats.