



香 港 商 船 資 訊

HONG KONG MERCHANT SHIPPING INFORMATION NOTE

Collision of Ships in Restricted Visibility

To : Shipowners, Ship Managers, Ship Operators, Masters and Officers

Summary

A Hong Kong registered container ship collided with another vessel in restricted visibility in the north west of Hawaiian Islands. This information note draws the attention of the shipboard staff to the importance on radar adjustment when navigating in rainstorm and rough sea, and to adhere to the STCW Code to notify the Master immediately if restricted visibility is encountered or expected.

The Incident

1. In January 2003 a Hong Kong registered container ship collided with another container vessel in the north west of Hawaiian Islands. The collision occurred in restricted visibility inside a rainstorm and in rough sea condition. Due to interference of heavy waves and rainstorm in the area, excessive clutters appeared near the center of the radar screen and blurred the echoes of the colliding vessel. The officer on watch feared that any attempt to reduce the sea and rain clutters on the radar might eliminate the echoes of a genuine ship target. As a result the colliding vessel remained undetected until at a very close range and collision could not be avoided.

2. When the sea and rain clutter control was re-adjusted immediately after the collision, echoes of the colliding ship became visible on the radar screen. Investigation into the incident identified that improper adjustment of the sea and rain clutter settings on the radar was the reason for failing to detect the colliding vessel before the collision. It was also found that the master was not on the bridge at the time of the collision.

Lessons

3. Under bad weather condition, the normal detection capability of the radar would be adversely affected by waves and rainstorm, making it difficult to differentiate a ship target. However, since the echoes generated by a steel hull vessel are stronger and more consistent than those of waves and rain, a genuine ship target is detectable by the radar if its sea and rain clutter settings are carefully adjusted to suppress the interference.

4. The need to notify the master immediately when restricted visibility is encountered or expected is of utmost importance. Para. 23.4 of Section A-VIII/2 of the STCW Code stipulates that *“The officer in charge of the navigational watch shall notify the master when in any doubt as to what action to take in the interest of safety”*. Para. 40.1 of the code further states that *“The officer in charge of the navigational watch shall notify the master immediately if restricted visibility is encountered or expected.”* Under restricted visibility conditions the presence of the master on the bridge is imperative to take over the command when situation warrants. Furthermore, should the master not be called up under this situation, the officer on watch would be deprived of the benefit of better knowledge, experience and judgment that can be provided by the master.

5. The attention of shipowners, ship managers, ship operators, master and officers is drawn on the lessons learnt above.

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