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HONG KONG MERCHANT SHIPPING INFORMATION NOTE

Code of Safe Working Practices for Merchant Seamen

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

Summary

The Steward of a Hong Kong registered ship laden with a cargo of iron ore fell down the stairs and died while he was ascending the stairs without holding the handrails when the vessel experienced a sudden and swift rolling movement at sea. This information note draws the attention of Shipowners, Ship Managers, Ship Operators, Masters, Officers and Crew to the importance of adhering to the Code of Safe Working Practices for Merchant Seamen at all times.

The Incident

1. The Steward of a Hong Kong registered bulk carrier fell down the stairs to the floor of the upper deck while he was ascending the stairs to the galley and carrying a pile of bowls with both hands. Just before the incident, the vessel experienced a sudden and swift rolling movement which caused him to lose his balance and fall. Following the incident, he suffered serious head injury. Despite immediate and continuous shipboard first aid and medical treatments, he passed away on the same day.
2. At the time of the incident, the vessel was laden with a cargo of iron ore and en-route from India to China. She was on an easterly course and was about 300 nm (nautical mile) to the west of the Malaca Strait. The weather was fine. The sky was cloudy. The visibility was about 7 nm. The wind was southwesterly with force 4. The sea state was slight to moderate with swell of wave height about 1.5 metres.
3. The investigation into the incident revealed that the Steward did not observe the Code of Safe Working Practices for Merchant Seamen as he ascended the stairs with both of his hands holding a pile of bowls. He had no free hand to grasp the handrail that caused him to lose his balance and fell to his death when the vessel suddenly rolled swiftly from one side to the other in the prevailing winds and swells.

Lessons Learnt

4. The lessons learnt from this incident are:

- shipboard personnel should always observe and follow the Code of Safe Working Practices for Merchant Seamen, and in particular, care should be taken as they move about the ship, and especially **when using stairs and companionway, one hand should always be kept free to grasp the handrail;**
- when vessel is laden with iron ore or other high-density cargoes at sea which renders her a “stiff” ship, it is important that shipboard personnel should be made aware of the typical behaviour of the vessel, being a “stiff” ship and its effects on personal safety during daily shipboard operations.

5. The attention of Shipowners, Ship Managers, Ship Operators, Masters, Officers and Crew is drawn to the lessons learnt above.

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25 February 2011