



香 港 商 船 資 訊

HONG KONG MERCHANT SHIPPING INFORMATION NOTE

Pilot-Master Exchange

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

Summary

A Hong Kong registered vessel collided with the fendering system of a bridge causing oil pollution when the vessel was transiting from inner harbour to sea under the navigational control of a licensed pilot in foggy weather. This Note draws the attention of shipboard staff to the importance of conducting a proper pilot-master exchange between the Master and the Pilot when arriving or leaving port.

The Incident

1. At about 0830 local time on 7 November 2007, a Hong Kong registered container carrier collided with the fendering system around the Delta Tower of the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge in foggy weather with a visibility of less than 0.25 nautical mile. At the time of collision, the vessel was transiting from a berth in the Oakland Inner Harbour to sea under the navigational control of a licensed pilot. As a result of the collision, the shell plating in way of No. 2 cargo hold and two fuel oil tanks on the portside were punctured. About 200 tonnes of heavy fuel oil were discharged from the above fuel oil tanks into San Francisco Bay causing pollution. The fendering system of the Delta Tower of the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge was also damaged by the collision.

2. Section A-VIII/2 of Seafarer's Training, Certification and Watchkeeping (STCW) Code stipulates that with a pilot on board, the master and pilot shall exchange information regarding navigation procedures, local conditions and the ship's characteristics. In the company's Bridge Procedures Manual of the vessel, masters are also required to consult the pilots on the passage plan to be followed. In this case, although the Pilot had discussed with the bridge team on his dissatisfaction with the radar images and tracking of targets, the Master had not consulted the Pilot and the Pilot had not informed the Master of his intended passage plan. Had the pilot and master exchanged information on the passage plan, it was possible that the collision could have been avoided.

Lessons Learnt

3. When a vessel is arriving or leaving a port under the navigational control of a pilot, a proper pilot-master exchange of information on the intended passage plan should be conducted between the master and the pilot. It is important that the Master and the ship's officers have sufficient knowledge of the passage plan to monitor the movement of the vessel accordingly.
4. The attention of ship managers, ship operators, masters and officers is drawn to the lessons learnt above.

Marine Department
Multi-lateral Policy Division

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