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HONG KONG MERCHANT SHIPPING INFORMATION NOTE

Man Falling Overboard during unrigging of combined accommodation and pilot ladder over shipside

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

Summary

While the Hong Kong registered vessel was underway, the Bosun worked on the lower platform of the accommodation ladder trying to recover the combined accommodation and pilot ladders after the disembarkation of ship pilot. He fell into the water and disappeared. His body was found later but was certified dead. This Information Note draws the attention of the shipowners, ship managers, ship operators, masters, officers and crew on the lessons learnt in the accident.

The Incident

1. The accident happened on board a Hong Kong registered vessel in an outbound voyage departing from the discharge port after the disembarkation of the ship pilot. It was dark at night, northwesterly wind at Beaufort scale six was blowing with moderate swells of about three meters in length. The ambient air temperature was 8°C.
2. The Bosun, Deck Cadet (DC) and two Ordinary Seamen (OS) were engaged in recovering of the combined accommodation and pilot ladders after the pilot disembarked from the vessel. The Bosun, who did not put on lifejacket nor life-vest, worked on the lower platform of the accommodation ladder disconnecting the latching tool fitted between the accommodation ladder and the pilot ladder, while the DC and two OS worked together to disconnect the ropes that weaved through the stanchions fixed onto the accommodation ladder. After completion of the aforementioned tasks, it was ready to recover the accommodation ladder.

3. As ordered by the Bosun, the DC started to operate the air motor of the winch to heave up the accommodation ladder, but it moved downward instead. The heaving operation was stopped and was tried again twice by the DC under Bosun's instructions, but the accommodation ladder still moved downward due to the wrong connection of the air hoses to the air motor that was detected in the investigation after the accident. Although the operation had been stopped, the accommodation ladder was subsequently found hanging vertically and produced a banging noise with the Bosun disappeared. The search and rescue operations were activated immediately. Unfortunately, the body of the Bosun was found many days later and was certified dead.

4. The investigation revealed the main contributing factors to the accident were:

- a) the Bosun did not follow company's safety procedures for unrigging of the accommodation ladder in that he should not work on the ladder when it was being operated and he should put on life vest or lifejacket when working over the shipside;
- b) the maintenance instructions of the accommodation ladder was not followed in which a shorter length of steel wire was used in the davit winch in question and one end of the steel wire was not properly anchored to the wire drum; and
- c) the two air hoses connecting the air motor and the control station could be wrongly connected, thus causing a reversal on the movement of the accommodation ladder (i.e. heaving instead of lowering, or vice versa).

Lessons Learnt

5. To avoid recurrence of similar accident, it is important that:

- a) company safety procedures for working over shipside should be strictly followed by crew members;
- b) manufacturer's maintenance instructions for the accommodation ladder davit winch should be complied with; and
- c) the design of the connection of the rubber air hoses between the air motor and the control station should ensure that incorrect connections would not be possible.

6. The attention of shipowners, ship managers, ship operators, masters, officers and crew is drawn to the lesson learnt above.