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HONG KONG MERCHANT SHIPPING INFORMATION NOTE

A chief engineer fell overboard and drowned while climbing down a pilot ladder

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

Summary

During disembarking from a Hong Kong registered ship, a chief engineer fell into the sea and drowned. This information note draws the attention of Shipowners, Ship Managers, Ship Operators, Masters, Officers and Crew to the lessons learnt from this accident.

The Accident

1. The accident happened on board a Hong Kong registered ship at an anchorage while waiting for berth to discharge cargo.
2. A chief engineer was going to leave by launch after finished his service on the ship. As soon as the launch arrived, he put on a life vest of unknown performance standard provided by the launch, then disembarked via a pilot ladder on the port side.
3. While the chief engineer was climbing halfway down the pilot ladder, he fell into the sea and sank. Few minutes later, he was found drifting at the stern of the ship unconsciously with his face down into the sea. After being recovered from the sea, he was sent ashore for rescue but in vain and was declared dead.
4. The investigation had identified the following contributory factors to this accident:
 - (a) a proper risk assessment for the disembarkation arrangement had not been carried out by taking into account the chief engineer's obese body, his health condition (heart disease) and the prevailing weather and sea conditions; and
 - (b) the chief engineer did not wear shipboard inflatable lifejacket or SOLAS lifejacket in accordance with the requirements of the shipboard safety management system.

Lessons learnt

5. For embarkation or disembarkation through gangway and pilot ladder on seaside of the ship:
 - (a) Proper risk assessment should be carried out by taking into account the prevailing weather and sea conditions as well as personnel's body and health condition for determination of the most appropriate arrangement (such as the use of pilot transfer combination arrangement), so as to ensure safe transferring of personnel between ship and launch.
 - (b) All personnel should wear certified inflatable lifejacket or SOLAS lifejacket that can turn an unconscious person into upright safe position on the sea surface.

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

Marine Department
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