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HONG KONG MERCHANT SHIPPING INFORMATION NOTE

A fatal accident on open deck under adverse weather

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

Summary

While two crew members were going out from the accommodation block to open deck on board a Hong Kong registered bulk carrier, one of them was smashed by heavy waves to his death and the other was injured seriously. This information note draws the attention of Shipowners, Ship Managers, Ship Operators, Masters, Officers and Crew to the lessons learnt from this accident.

The Incident

1. The accident happened on board a Hong Kong registered bulk carrier while she was sailing in the South China Sea under adverse weather and sea conditions.
2. When a fitter and an engine cadet just went to the port quarter deck through the weathertight door of the accommodation to clean oil stain on deck, they were smashed by heavy waves. The engine cadet died two hours later due to serious injury on his head. The fitter was also seriously injured and recovered after about one-month's medical treatment.
3. Investigation into the accident revealed the following contributory factors :
 - the senior officers of both the deck and engine departments of the vessel had failed to discharge their diligent duties to carry out proper risk assessment before assigning crew to work on open deck under heavy weather and sea conditions; and
 - the implementation of the shipboard Safety Management System was a total failure.
4. It was also found that the shipboard procedure of handling bunker samples was not strictly followed. The bunker samples were placed on the main deck for a long period of time after bunkering instead of placing it in a designated space.

Lessons Learnt

5. Senior officers must be prudent when assigning their crew members to work open deck under adverse weather and sea conditions. If it is really necessary to carry out such work, the shipboard safety procedures and “Code of Safe Working Practices for Merchant Seafarers” must be strictly followed. Particularly, a risk assessment should be undertaken. Furthermore, the senior officers must also ensure that their crew members are fully aware of and staying alert about the potential risks and safety precautions, and monitor their work closely.
6. Bunker samples must be retained in a designated space in accordance with the relevant shipboard procedure.
7. The attention of Shipowners, Ship Managers, Ship Operators, Masters, Officers and Crew is drawn to the lessons learnt above.

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