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HONG KONG MERCHANT SHIPPING INFORMATION NOTE

Fatal fall from cargo hold tween deck opening

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

Summary

In planning to replace a hoist motor in a cargo hold, the chief engineer fell from height through the cargo hold tween deck opening which led to his death. This Note draws the attention of shipowners, ship managers, ship operators, masters, officers and crew to the lessons learnt from this accident.

The Incident

1. When the discharge of cargo from a Hong Kong registered general cargo ship was completed, a safety meeting was carried out for the replacement work of a hoist motor installed under the longitudinal cargo hold hatch coaming inside a cargo hold. After the meeting, the chief officer and the second engineer went inside the cargo hold to discuss the replacement work there. The chief engineer joined them later in the cargo hold and left alone after a short discussion with them.
2. Shortly afterwards, a scream was heard from the forward lower hold. The chief engineer was found lying on the bottom of the forward lower hold which was about 7.91 metres below the cargo hold tween deck opening. The chief engineer was sent to a local hospital and certified dead on the same day.
3. The investigation identified the main factor leading to the accident was that the crew did not follow the company's safety management system to carry out the required safety procedures for the issue of the entry into enclosed space permit for the cargo hold. The crew failed to carry out a thorough risk assessment and due attentiveness had not been given to the proper fencing at the tween deck opening in accordance with the "Code of Safe Working Practices for Merchant Seafarers".

4. The investigation also revealed that there was no chin strap attached to the safety helmet worn by the chief engineer.

Lessons Learnt

5. In order to avoid recurrence of similar accidents in the future, masters, officers and crew of vessels should:

- (a) always conduct a full risk assessment with the issuance of entry into enclosed space permit before entering a cargo hold in accordance with the requirements of the company's safety management system;
- (b) restrict entry of personnel into tween deck space when some of the pontoon covers have been removed. If necessary, safety measures must be put in place to prevent people from falling;
- (c) always wear safety helmets attached with chin straps which should also be tightened to prevent the helmets from falling off.

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

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