



香港商船資訊

HONG KONG MERCHANT SHIPPING INFORMATION NOTE

Collision between two container vessels while overtaking on river Elbe

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

Summary

A Hong Kong registered container vessel collided with another container vessel while both vessels were proceeding upstream on the river Elbe, bound for Hamburg. The incident resulted in an unlash container and a crew member falling overboard and the latter was found dead after being recovered from the water an hour later. 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. A Hong Kong registered container vessel (*vessel A*) collided with another container vessel (*vessel B*) whose gross tonnage was less than 10% of *vessel A* while both vessels were proceeding upstream on the river Elbe, bound for Hamburg under pilotage. At the time of the collision, *vessel A* had overtaken *vessel B* at the port side of the latter under favourable weather and visibility conditions. *Vessel B*, being the overtaken vessel, suddenly lost her steerability due to the effect of the hydrodynamic interactions (suction effect) between both vessels during overtaking, and swiftly turned with her bow towards the stern of *vessel A*, finally causing both vessels to collide with each other. The collision caused *vessel B* to develop a starboard list of 30° to 40°, resulting in an unlash container on board and a crew member, who was engaged in unlash the containers on deck, falling overboard. The missing crew member was found dead after being recovered from the water an hour later.

2. The investigation identified that the contributory factors leading to the accident were as follows:

- (a) *Vessel A*, being the overtaking vessel carrying out overtaking manoeuvres in a narrow channel, failed to indicate her intention by sounding the appropriate signal

to the overtaken *vessel B*, and failed to obtain agreement from *vessel B* to take steps to permit her safe passing in response to corresponding safety speed and distance in accordance with Rule 9 of the “International Regulations for Preventing Collisions at Sea, 1972” (COLREGS); and

- (b) *Vessel B* failed to safeguard the crew against falling when performing unlash activities on deck at a certain level of height aboard the moving vessel. *Vessel B* also failed to secure the container, which was fallen overboard in this incident, on the deck of the moving vessel as far as practicable throughout the voyage to avoid damages and hazards to both the ship and the crew, as well as the potential loss of cargo overboard in accordance with Regulation VI/5 of the “International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea” (SOLAS). The crew of *vessel B* demonstrated a lack of safety awareness without wearing adequate personal protective equipment, such as safety belts, during the unlash work.

Lessons Learnt

- 3. In order to avoid recurrence of similar accidents in the future: -
 - (a) officers on navigational watch should comply with the requirement of Rule 9 of COLREGS during overtaking manoeuvres in narrow channels to indicate an intention by sounding the appropriate signal to the vessel to be overtaken and obtain agreement from the vessel to be overtaken for safe passing;
 - (b) all ships should comply with Regulation VI/5 of SOLAS throughout the voyage to secure cargoes stowed on or under deck as to prevent as far as practicable damages or hazards to the ships and the persons on board, and loss of cargo overboard; and
 - (c) ship management companies should ensure effective implementation of shipboard Safety Management System and enhance training and safety awareness of crew members, particularly in safe passing in narrow channels, performing safe lashing and unlash activities on board, and using adequate personal protective equipment during work.
- 4. The attention of shipowners, ship managers, ship operators, masters, officers, and crew is drawn to the lessons learnt above.

Marine Department
Multi-lateral Policy Division

16 November 2023