

MARINE DEPARTMENT NOTICE NO. 118/2021

(Navigational & Seamanship Safety Practices)

Oil spill incident of a container ship in Hong Kong

The Incident

At the time of the incident, a container ship (*the vessel*) berthed alongside Kwai Chung Container Terminals, Hong Kong was receiving heavy fuel oil (HFO) from a bunker barge. Spillage of HFO was found on the starboard weather deck of *the vessel* after its six HFO tanks had been filled simultaneously for about three hours. Bunker operation stopped immediately when the duty officer announced an emergency situation. About 49 m³ of HFO overflowed and ran into the sea along the shipside.

2. The investigation found that the level gauge of one of the HFO tanks was faulty with its pointer got stuck at one position without being noticed until the occurrence of oil spill. During the bunker operation, the crew only observed the level gauges of the HFO tanks and did not verify the quantity of HFO intake by taking manual soundings. There was also a communication breakdown between *the vessel* and the bunker barge with regard to the bunker pumping rate.

Lessons Learnt

3. Ship crew should take manual soundings of all fuel oil tanks during bunker operation in order to verify the readings shown on the fuel oil tanks' level gauges. Ship crew should also ensure effective communication with the bunker barge regarding the bunker pumping rate during bunker operation.

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