

MARINE DEPARTMENT NOTICE NO. 177/2022

(Navigational & Seamanship Safety Practices)

Fire accident happened during loading operation

The Incident

A fire accident happened on a Panama registered general cargo vessel during cargo loading operation at Kellett Anchorage, Hong Kong. The vessel was loaded with the cargo of scrap metal in bulk from local barges using their derricks and spider grabs. During cargo trimming, the chief officer saw smoke emitting from the cargo hold. The crew of the vessel tried to extinguish the fire with fire hoses on board but failed. The fire was finally extinguished by the Fire Services Department the next day. Fortunately, apart from structural damage to the vessel, the accident did not result in casualties and oil pollution.

2. The investigation identified that the contributory factors leading to this accident were that the crew members underestimated the risk of loading scrap metal that might spontaneously combust; failed to follow the shipboard Safety Management System (SMS) to carry out a risk assessment properly and establish a contingency plan to respond to the potential fire risk when loading scrap metal, especially when trimming the cargo by the grab; failed to select an appropriate opportunity to use the shipboard CO₂ system for combating the fire; and failed to maintain the shipboard bilge pump properly for emergency use to bring the vessel upright when having a heavy listing as a result of accumulated water used for firefighting.

Lessons Learnt

3. In order to avoid the recurrence of similar accidents during operation in the

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future, the ship management company, masters, officers, and crew members should:

- (a) enhance safety awareness of the risk of loading scrap metal that might spontaneously combust;
- (b) ensure a risk assessment is carried out before loading scrap metal cargo in bulk according to the shipboard SMS to establish procedures to respond to the hazards identified;
- (c) ensure the shipboard CO₂ system is used for firefighting at an appropriate opportunity; and
- (d) enhance shipboard maintenance to ensure emergency equipment is ready for emergency use.

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