

MARINE DEPARTMENT NOTICE NO. 101 OF 2013

(Safety Practices)

Electrical fire on board a fishing vessel

The Accident

A fire accident happened on board a local fishing vessel in the early morning when it was mooring alongside other fishing vessels inside a typhoon shelter in Hong Kong. The fire started at a washing machine installed amidships on the starboard side of the vessel and spread quickly while combustible materials were ignited nearby. The owner and three workmen on the vessel evacuated to the port stern of the vessel to escape from the fire. However, the owner then went back to his cabin at the forward part of the vessel. The three crew members finally escaped to another fishing vessel mooring at its port side. The fire was later put out by the firemen, but the owner of the vessel was missing. His body was subsequently found on the seabed near the stricken vessel on the next day.

2. The investigation into the accident revealed that the main contributory factors to the accident were:

- a) short-circuiting of the electric washing machine started the fire and ignited combustible materials nearby; and
- b) the owner was seriously burnt by the fire and drowned after jumping into the sea.

3. The investigation also revealed that the fire extinguishers and lifejackets were not placed in strategic locations on the vessel. Crew members were not able to get hold of the fire extinguishers in time to fight the fire. Also, the owner could not find a lifejacket before jumping into the sea.

4. To prevent the recurrence of a similar accident, owners, masters and persons in charge of all locally licensed fishing vessels should note the lessons learnt in this accident:

- a) All electrical appliances on board a vessel should be maintained properly to prevent electrical fire hazards;
- b) All portable fire extinguishers on board should be stowed in accordance with the Table 7, Schedule 4 of Merchant Shipping (Local Vessels) (Safety and Survey) Regulation, Cap. 548G;

- c) Lifejackets should be placed in strategic locations so that persons on the vessel could be able to find lifejackets easily in case of emergencies;
- d) Combustible materials should be stowed as far as practicable from potential fire hazardous installations;
- e) Fire drills should be conducted at regular intervals to familiarize the crew in dealing with fire emergencies.

Francis H. P. LIU
Director of Marine

Marine Department

Government of the HKSAR

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