



香港商船資訊

HONG KONG MERCHANT SHIPPING INFORMATION NOTE

A fatal accident happened inside a cargo hold onboard a bulk carrier

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

Summary

A fatal accident occurred on board a Hong Kong-registered bulk carrier (*the vessel*) while underway in the Atlantic Ocean en route from the United States to the United Kingdom. *The vessel's* Chief Officer (*the C/O*) was found unconscious on top of a cargo of wood pellets in the No.1 cargo hold (*the hold*). Despite immediate rescue efforts upon discovery, *the C/O* was subsequently confirmed dead. 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. After all five cargo holds were fully loaded with wood pellets, *the vessel* departed from the loading port on the east coast of the United States. In accordance with safety procedures for transporting wood pellets, *the C/O* was responsible for conducting daily atmospheric testing in all cargo holds during the voyage. Records indicated that gas readings for the first three days were within safe limits. Around lunchtime on the fourth day, *the C/O* was reported missing, and the crew immediately initiated a search on board. Shortly afterwards, *the C/O* was found unconscious on top of the cargo in *the hold*, and a walkie-talkie was found hanging from the handle of the watertight door near the entrance to *the hold* (*the hold entrance*). A gas detector was discovered on the deck near *the hold entrance*, but its battery was missing. The battery was later found on the cargo surface close to *the C/O's* body. The crew quickly organised a rescue operation, hoisting *the C/O* to the main deck within a few minutes and administering cardiopulmonary resuscitation immediately. Despite resuscitation efforts, *the C/O* was subsequently confirmed dead on board.

2. The investigation identified the following probable contributory factors:

- (a) misinterpretation of gas test results obtained in the days prior to the accident, leading to the mistaken belief that the atmosphere in *the hold* was safe for entry;

- (b) *the C/O* might have conducted atmospheric testing improperly and entered *the hold* hastily, and collapsed shortly thereafter due to an extremely low oxygen level in *the hold*;
- (c) *the C/O* failed to comply with the enclosed space entry procedures required by the shipboard Safety Management System (SMS). In addition, *the hold entrance* was neither locked nor properly secured, and no warning signs were posted in accordance with the Code of Safe Working Practices for Merchant Seafarers (*the Code*);
- (d) the shipboard SMS did not specify procedures for crew members to conduct atmospheric testing for enclosed cargo holds, whether through gas sampling points or other safe methods; and
- (e) *the C/O* did not exercise safety precautions commensurate with the level of hazard, and the shipboard safety mechanism failed to prevent *the C/O* from entering *the hold*.

Lessons Learnt

3. To prevent the recurrence of similar accidents in future, ship management companies, all masters, officers and crew members should note items (a) to (d) below, while ship management companies should also pay attention to items (e) and (f) to:

- (a) ensure that gas detection is conducted correctly on board, particularly in cargo spaces prone to oxygen depletion. Entry into enclosed spaces must be strictly prohibited unless safety is confirmed;
- (b) strictly follow enclosed space entry procedures required by the shipboard SMS, including conducting risk assessment, issuing entry permits, assigning standby personnel and notifying the company;
- (c) strictly comply with *the Code* to lock or properly secure access to enclosed spaces and post warning signs;
- (d) enhance crew safety awareness regarding the fatal risks associated with enclosed spaces, particularly cargo holds containing IMSBC Code Category B cargoes;
- (e) stipulate proper gas sampling procedures in the shipboard SMS, specifically addressing situations where sampling points are obstructed by loaded cargoes; and

- (f) conduct internal audits on board to ensure that the crew strictly comply with the requirements for enclosed space entry under the shipboard SMS.

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

5. For further enquiry, please contact via email: ss-mai@mardep.gov.hk.

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