

LOCAL VESSELS SAFETY BULLETIN NO. 01/2026

FIRE SAFETY ON LOCAL VESSELS

2 June 2026

To: Shipowners, Operators, Agents, Coxswains, Engine Operators,
and Crew of Hong Kong Local Vessels

A fire on board a vessel poses significant threat to life, vessels and the environment. The enclosed nature of a vessel and the potential presence of combustible materials, cargoes and fuels can allow a fire to develop rapidly. This safety bulletin highlights common fire hazards onboard and outlines essential preventive measures.

Vessels vary in design, intended purpose, and operation; consequently, fire hazards can differ significantly from vessel to vessel. This safety bulletin aims to assist vessel owners and operators to identify the specific hazards applicable to their vessel and implementing corresponding preventive measures.

COMMON FIRE HAZARDS ONBOARD

Three essential elements are needed for combustion to start and sustain a fire, i.e. heat, fuel and oxygen. A proactive approach to manage fire safety requires an understanding of sources of heat and fuel on board. Key fire hazards on board include:

- (i) **Flammable Liquids and Combustible Materials:** Improper storage or handling of fuels, oils, chemicals, and other combustible materials (e.g., oil-soaked rags) presents a significant fire risk.
- (ii) **Machinery Spaces:** Leaks of fuel or lubricating oil from engines and associated piping, when contacting with high-temperature surfaces such as exhaust manifolds, are a primary cause of machinery space fires.
- (iii) **Electrical Systems:** Fires can originate from faulty wiring, short circuits, overloaded circuits, or defective electrical appliances.
- (iv) **Hot Work:** Operations such as welding, grinding, or flame cutting generate sparks and intense heat, which can ignite nearby flammable gas or combustible materials.
- (v) **Galley Operations:** The use of open flames and high-heat cooking appliances provides heat, and the method of cooking use oils which is a fuel itself, also generate another excellent fuel when it is accumulated as grease in the cooking hood. Together these pose high potential of galley fire.

- (vi) **Cargo:** Certain cargoes may be flammable, reactive, or prone to spontaneous heating, necessitating careful handling, stowage and management.
- (vii) **Smoking:** Smoking significantly increases the risk of fire. It may even cause explosion if smoking in area where flammable vapors may be present or accumulated.

ESSENTIAL PREVENTIVE ACTIONS

The following preventive measures are suggested for responsible parties to consider to include in their shipboard fire safety strategy:

- (i) **Hazard Control and Good Housekeeping:** Store flammable materials securely in designated locations, ensure proper maintenance of all electrical systems and appliances, constant cleaning of grease accumulated in cooking hoods, safe cargo operations, and enforce strict non-smoking policies.
- (ii) **Proactive Machinery Maintenance:** Conduct regular inspections of engines, fuel systems, and lubrication systems to minimise leaks in advance. Ensure adequate insulation and shielding is fitted to hot surfaces.
- (iii) **Control of Hot Work:** Welding, flame cutting, and other hot work must be conducted by certified personnel under a controlled permit-to-work system. The work area and adjacent spaces affected by hot work must be cleared of combustibles, and appropriate fire-fighting equipment is provided in proximity.
- (iv) **Emergency Procedures:** Ensure the emergency procedures include instruction to call 999 for emergency services in fire incidents.
- (v) **Emergency Preparedness:** Ensure fire control plans, muster list, and emergency procedures are updated, communicated, and understood by all crew members. Clearly define and regularly review individual roles and responsibilities.
- (vi) **Maintenance of Fire-Fighting Equipment:** All fire-fighting appliances, including portable extinguishers, fire hoses, and fixed fire-fighting systems on board must be constantly inspected and maintained in good working order and readily available for immediate use.
- (vii) **Training and Drills:** Conduct regular, realistic fire drills and training sessions to ensure all crew are proficient in emergency procedures and readiness, the proper use of appropriate fire-fighting equipment, and general fire prevention practices.

In summary, sustained awareness, rigorous implementation of preventive measures, and a commitment to preparedness are important in minimizing fire risks and

managing emergency fire situations to ensure a safer operating environment together.

QUALITY MANAGEMENT SECTION

MARINE DEPARTMENT

GOVERNMENT OF THE HKSAR