

Light on cargo fires



Reports have recently reached the Club of a substantial claim involving a cargo fire caused by the improper operation of cargo lights.

The case concerned four 500-watt quartz halogen cargo lights, positioned high up under the weather deck of a vessel loading maize and wheat bran pellets. The lights were operated by four separate switches mounted on a single control box in the mast house between holds 2 and 3. Each hold was lit by two lights. A number, written in faded red ink, poorly identified the light that each switch operated. It was easy to assume the switches operated the lights in only one hold.

Maize was loaded into hold 3, with the hold lights buried under the

surface of the stow. The vessel then shifted to another terminal and started loading the wheat bran pellets into hold 2 during the hours of darkness. When the hold 2 lights were turned on, all four switches - including those operating the already full hold 3 - were activated. It was only much later, after loading, that smoke was seen coming from hold 2, and smouldering fires were discovered directly under both lights in each of the holds.

Investigations revealed that even much lower-wattage lamps than the ones involved in this case may give rise to fires if in direct contact with grain cargoes. So Members are urged to ensure that crews - and especially those new on board or still being familiarised with the operation of the vessel - are made fully aware

of safety procedures concerning the operation of lights. Standard measures will include the removal of fuses or the pulling of circuit breakers immediately before grain or other potentially combustible bulk cargoes are loaded. If additional lighting is required, it is standard practice to employ portable cluster lamps hung over the side of the hatch coamings.

(Brookes Bell Jarrett Kirman)

IMO bulk initiatives

IMO has approved the Manual on Loading and Unloading of Solid Bulk Cargoes for Terminal Representatives contained in the Annex to the Code of Practice for the Safe Loading and Unloading of Bulk Carriers (BLU Code). It has urged shipowners and operators, governments and terminals to apply the guidance contained in the Manual, and has also invited governments to implement the BLU Code. IMO has also reviewed and issued a list of solid bulk cargoes for which a fixed gas fire-extinguishing system may be exempted, and one for which it is ineffective. These lists are not exhaustive, and governments granting exemptions, or approving equivalent fire-extinguishing systems for other cargoes, have been requested to provide IMO with details.

For details, visit: www.imo.org

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Warning over liquefaction of dry bulk cargoes



The Club has very recently received reports of a number of casualties involving vessels laden with Chinese fluorspar cargo, carried from Hong Kong.

The vessels in question are said to have developed severe lists. In one instance, the result was the reported loss of the vessel off Sri Lanka. And in another case it was necessary for the crew to abandon ship.

The information so far available indicates some connection between the casualties and the cargo carried - in particular, its moisture content and flow properties.

As described in the IMO BC Code, mineral cargoes which contain moisture and a proportion of fine

particles can undergo liquefaction during ocean transport, if shipped above the transportable moisture limit. Accordingly, to prevent hazardous liquefaction occurring, the IMO BC Code (which includes a non-exhaustive list of other materials capable of attaining a flow state) requires the testing of cargo flow properties and certification by shippers, prior to loading.

However, in the recent cases, it appears that the only information provided by the shippers concerned the moisture content of the cargo and contained no data regarding its flow properties. In the circumstances, members are reminded to be aware of the potential risks involved with the carriage of such cargoes and of the related provisions of the IMO BC Code.

Equatorial Guinea alert

A recent case highlighted the need for special care over compliance with local regulations governing entry into the waters of Equatorial Guinea. Reports reaching the Club indicate that, while waiting to enter the port of Limbe, Cameroon, a ship drifted into the waters of the nearby Bioko Island, some twenty miles off Cameroon and part of the territory of Equatorial Guinea. The vessel was approached by a patrol boat and the master and chief engineer were ordered ashore.

The vessel was ordered to anchor and the passports and seaman's books of all crew members were confiscated. Although the master and chief engineer were housed in a hotel and treated cordially, the authorities alleged a variety of infractions on the part of the ship and threatened the imposition of a number of different penalties. For example, the initial claim was that, since the vessel had failed to fly the flag of Equatorial Guinea, it was susceptible to a penalty of roughly \$200,000. But alternative allegations were later raised, based on claims that the vessel had failed to fly the flag of its home state and had anchored without authority in territorial waters. Very difficult negotiations ensued until, with no resort available to legal relief, and to achieve the ship's departure, it became possible for the owners to settle the case at a reduced figure of \$50,000. Members are consequently urged to exercise caution when approaching the waters of Equatorial Guinea.



Blocking or plugging the drain



One of the problems typically encountered during the loading and unloading of some bulk materials, and particularly coal, is blockage of the vessel's hatch coaming drains by such cargo. And one way by which an attempt was made to address the difficulty was to temporarily plug the coaming drain holes during loading and discharge, to prevent that sort of clogging.

However, it is of course imperative to ensure that, upon completion of cargo work, the hatch covers are not closed with the plugs still in place. And, as can be seen in the photograph above, attaching a coloured lanyard to the bungs can serve as a useful safeguard against such an oversight.

(Taylor Marine, TR Little, Liverpool)

Minimising medical costs in the US

Members will be aware that medical expenses in the United States can be very substantial, and extremely difficult to control. And the Club's experience is that the effective co-ordination and management of expenditure in these difficult cases should be enhanced by the involvement, from the outset, of the local P&I correspondent. The Club is aware of some instances - particularly in and around the US Gulf - where local agents have engaged medical

brokers to assist owners. But experience gleaned in such cases suggests that there was no obvious enhancement to the monitoring and handling of the costs incurred with, on occasion, unwelcome complications in the disposal of the claim arising. Accordingly, the Club reiterates that claims involving medical costs in the US are likely to benefit from the very early appointment and attendance of the local correspondent or, in more serious cases, P&I attorney.

Passage plan appraisal

Passage planning is usually broken down into four distinct stages - appraisal, planning, execution and monitoring. *Stoploss 38* highlighted the difficulties which can arise out of the planning phase - where areas of danger, once identified, are not marked properly on navigational charts. And reports recently reaching the Club (including those found at www.maib.dft.gov.uk/home/index.cfm) also emphasise the importance of care and attention during the appraisal stage.

The appraisal of the passage plan should encompass the identification and thorough review of all publications pertinent to the intended voyage. But, in one recent case, a vessel was reportedly approaching a port while following the 'inshore' route recommended for smaller craft, rather than the appropriate 'offshore' route for larger ships. The mistake was identified by the local VTS and subsequently investigated on the vessel's arrival at the port. The investigation confirmed that all appropriate publications had been consulted during the appraisal process, but that the relevant routeing guide was misread. As a result, the passage plan - which was acknowledged to have been prepared correctly in all other respects, and then carefully executed - had followed the wrong port approach.



The case for maintenance



Regular safety-related checks must be maintained

The Club has recently seen a claim which proved once again that failure to observe regular and routine onboard testing and maintenance can sometimes result in tragic consequences.

The third engineer on board a vessel berthed in Singapore fell down an

elevator shaft, as a result of which he suffered serious injuries. The accident occurred when the engineer called the elevator from the main deck. When the elevator door opened, the engineer stepped inside. Unfortunately, the elevator itself was on the lower engine-room deck, and consequently the engineer fell down the lift shaft from a height of two storeys.

Members are reminded of the importance of proper onboard safety and maintenance procedures. And so far as elevators, specifically, are concerned, great care should be taken over responsibility for and retention of any override keys, while all safety-related interlocks should be fully operational. There is no substitute for routine testing and regular maintenance.

US Coast Guard imposes conditions of entry

The US Coast Guard is imposing conditions of entry on vessels arriving from countries which have not instituted effective anti-terrorism measures - the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mauritania, and Nauru.

Vessels which have called in one or more of these countries during their last five port calls will be affected unless they have (1)

implemented Security Level 2 in the ship plan; (2) placed guards at each access point while in port; (3) executed or tried to execute a Declaration of Security; (4) logged all security actions; (5) reported actions taken in the US advance notice of arrival; and (6) ensured that each access point to the vessel is manned by armed, private security guards acceptable to the USCG while the vessel is in a US port. **(Holland + Knight)**

Beyond the call of duty

Club correspondents perform a vital service for P&I clubs and their members. And, sometimes, they do things which can only be described as being beyond the call of duty.

Such was certainly the case following a recent incident in which a crew member was taken seriously ill on board a vessel at Dar es Salaam. The man required daily blood transfusions, and representatives of TCI Africa, the P&I correspondent in Dar es Salaam, donated blood themselves. They also kept a member of staff present at the man's bedside at all times throughout the ordeal.

The owner concerned greatly appreciated the outstanding dedication of the correspondent, commenting, "You have walked that extra mile in providing service to the shipowner. Offering to donate blood is the ultimate humanitarian gesture, and one cannot ask for a gift more precious than that."

In-house events

- 'Hatch Covers and Ultrasonic Testing' - A talk by Walter Vervloesem of surveyors IMCS, Antwerp - September 7, 1200hrs.
- 'The delivery of Cargo Against Letters of Indemnity' - A talk by Russell Crumplin of Thomas Cooper & Stibbard - October 26, 1200hrs.
- 'An Introduction to the IMDG Code' - David Fletcher, of Bilbroughs, November 23, 1200hrs.

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