



भारत सरकार / GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
पोत परिवहन, मंत्रालय
MINISTRY OF SHIPPING,
नौवहन महाविदेशालय / DIRECTORATE GENERAL OF SHIPPING
"जहाज भवन" / "JAHJAZ BHAVAN"

टेलिफोन: 22613651-54
फैक्स : 91-22-22613655
E-Mail: dgship@dgshipping.com

वालचंद छेराचंद मार्ग / W. H. MARG,
मुंबई / MUMBAI - 400 001

Tele: 22613651-54
Fax: 91-22-22613655
Web: www.dgshipping.com

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Casualty Circular No. 15/2013

Case of missing crew from an Oil tanker

1. What happened?

On 21st August 2010, at 2130 hrs, an Oiler, 26 years of age, was reported to be missing from an oil tanker. At the time of the incident, the vessel was shifting from alongside the berth at a port to outer anchorage. Weather at the time was, calm seas, low swell, wind-6 knots and Temp- 29 deg.

2. How it happened?

2.1 Vessel had left the berth at 1830 hrs, on 21st August and was proceeding to outer anchorage. The pilot disembarked at 1936 hrs and vessel proceeded to its planned anchorage position. At 2130 hrs, while the vessel was anchoring, one of the crew members reported that the Oiler could not be found on board. Vessel anchored at 2148 hrs and all crew were mustered. It was reported that the Oiler was last seen on board at 2030 hrs, while having dinner, by other crew members. A search was carried out on board from 2215 hrs to 2300 hrs and it was ascertained that the Oiler was not on board.

2.2 The vessel picked up anchor at 0024 hrs on the 22nd and proceeded for a search and rescue operation. A distress alert was transmitted and assistance was requested from the Coast Guard through the VTMS. As the vessel was loaded to a draft of 10.5 mtrs the area of search was limited to the Safety fairway, to keep the vessel well-clear of navigational hazards. At 0208 hrs on the 22nd, vessel reached the position where the Oiler was last seen on board.

The search was assisted by a Coast Guard vessel and vessels in the vicinity were asked, by the MRCC, to keep a sharp lookout for the missing Oiler and render necessary assistance. The search was called off on 24th August 2010 at 1436 hrs, as advised by the MRCC and the vessel re-anchored at the outer anchorage.

2.3 Although a dead body was reported to have been spotted by one of the Pilot boats in the vicinity of the port from where the ship had cast off, the body could not be traced later.

2.4 No further information is available regarding the missing Oiler or the circumstances and therefore the reasons for the disappearance of the Oiler could not be ascertained.

3. Why it happened?

Definite conclusions cannot be drawn due to insufficient information and it can only be speculated that the Oiler fell overboard, inadvertently, while walking on deck near the ship side, due to various probable causes. He could have stumbled on an obstruction, slipped on a wet deck or may have leaned over the ship side railing for unknown reasons and fallen overboard.

4. Lessons learnt.

4.1 Hazards of moving carelessly on open decks should be highlighted to crew members on board, at regular intervals. Complacency and overconfidence, particularly, in case of experienced ship staff, can also lead to accidents.

4.2 Ship owners/managers/operators should implement procedures on board that would discourage crew members from going out on open decks during hours of darkness, rough weather etc. If necessary, they should inform the bridge or concerned supervisors and allowed on deck, during these times, only for valid reasons and if considered to be safe.

4.3 Ship owners/managers/operators should carry out risk assessments and identify potential hazards that exist on board due to which crew members are likely to fall overboard. Appropriate control measures should be implemented to mitigate the consequences of identified hazards by way of procedures, physical barriers, highlighting of obstructions or design changes as appropriate.



Capt. Harish Khatri

Dy. Director General of Shipping [Tech]