

# RISK ALERT



STEAMSHIP MUTUAL

## Working on Deck in Heavy Weather

### Introduction

The Club has undertaken a review of 180 crew injury and death claims cases incurred in the 2010-2012 underwriting years.

In total, there were 21 fatalities and two thirds of these involved deck personnel. The majority of those deaths involved personnel being lost overboard; either washed away in heavy weather or lost in unexplained circumstances, suggestive of suicide.

In those cases where personnel were on deck in heavy weather, it appears that the risk assessment leading to the decision to deploy crew on deck was inadequate.

Masters and Owners have an obligation to ensure their crews are provided with a safe workplace and that they are regularly trained in emergency procedures such as MOB drills.

Just as Masters and Owners have a duty of care to provide a safe workplace, crew members also have a duty of care, to ensure that they themselves work safely.

The Code of Safe Working Practices for Merchant Seamen (COSWP) Section 13.9 states that *'no seafarer should be on deck during heavy weather unless it is absolutely necessary for the safety of the ship or crew'*.



In winter conditions, on being swept overboard the casualty would almost certainly be affected by cold water shock and hypothermia would soon cause unconsciousness and death. In view of this, wearing proper PPE such as an immersion suit and a lifejacket would significantly increase the seafarer's chances of survival, and would also make it easier for his colleagues to rescue him.

### Recommendations

The Club recommend the following pre-work steps:

1) Work on deck during heavy weather should be authorised by the Master only and the bridge watch should be informed

2) A risk assessment should be undertaken

3) A permit to work and a company checklist for work on deck in heavy weather should be completed

4) Any persons required to go on deck during heavy weather should wear a suitable life-jacket, proper PPE, and be equipped with a portable transceiver

5) Seafarers should work in pairs or in teams. All seafarers should be under the command of an experienced senior officer.

**The risk assessment should give consideration to a number of factors, including the following:**

- The necessity of the work. (i.e. can it wait until daylight, the next

port, do the risks outweigh the benefits?)

- Permit to work and company checklist completed.
- Adjust vessel's course and speed
- Rigging lifelines
- Lifejackets with safety harnesses
- Proper PPE for the job
- Deck lights if required
- Visual contact from bridge
- Working in teams/pairs
- Water-proof portable radios
- Be aware that even in a regular wave pattern, "rogue" waves can exist which can vary in direction and size from the regular wave pattern being experienced.
- ALWAYS plan for, and expect, the unexpected
- Making sure that all the equipment is of approved type and well maintained

#### Case study 1:

On 25 November 2012, two crew members were washed overboard from a general cargo vessel. The accident occurred during heavy weather in the North Sea. Both men lost their lives; the body of one of them was recovered from the sea by helicopter following a search and rescue operation. The body of the other was never found.

The two crew members had proceeded onto the aft mooring deck to secure a coiled mooring

rope that had loosened in its stowed position.

They were struck by a large wave, which washed them overboard, causing their respective lifelines, which were secured to the vessel, to part.

The investigation concluded that the risk assessment made at the time was not adequate and should have taken into consideration the possibility of waves breaking astern on the poop-deck in the severe following weather.

#### Case Study 2:

On 3 January 2012, whilst an oil and chemical tanker was on passage in heavy weather, a ventilator head on the forecastle became detached. A team of four crew members went on deck and successfully covered the opening left by the ventilator head. The Chief Officer and Second Engineer then attempted to secure the loose ventilator head on the main deck. They were struck by a wave that washed across the deck. The Chief Officer died of his injuries.

The subsequent investigation concluded that the Master and Chief Officer were aware of the hazards on deck, but their perception and approach to the situation did not include a thorough assessment of the risks. No lifejackets or lifelines were worn by the crew on deck except for the Second Engineer, who wore a fire-fighter's lifeline. Although no one was washed overboard all but one person lost his life due to severe injuries

caused by the breaking wave on deck.

Further relevant information can be found at the following links to the UK Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) website:

<http://www.dft.gov.uk/mca/coswp/2010.pdf>

[Code of Safe Working Practices for Merchant Seamen]

<http://www.dft.gov.uk/mca/msn1731.pdf>

[Merchant Shipping and Fishing Vessels Personal Protective Equipment Regulations. (MSN) 1731 (M+F), published in August 1999]

For further information on this or other Loss Prevention topics please contact the Loss Prevention Department, Steamship Insurance Management Services Ltd.

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