

Avoidance of Collisions

It has been widely observed that when a collision occurs there are certain human mistakes and erroneous conduct that lead to significant property losses as well as risk the lives of the crew on board. What is very intriguing is the fact that such transgressions are constantly repeated at sea, in spite of advancements in technology, training of crew and safety regulations.

VHF exchanges at a time of imminent peril compounds the problem and increases the risks for a collision, VHF communication as a rule should not be used in place of immediate action, It must however be noted that there may certainly be circumstances where a VHF exchange can be of use, as for example to inform the other ship of one's actions and so avoid a casualty by minimum effort.

One of the most fundamental causes of collisions is navigational acts in direct contrast with COLREGS. The issue remains that when in danger, the rules require that very specific steps be followed, otherwise both their power and their purpose are defeated.

A second and equally important misconduct is the lack of good radar and visual lookout (COLREGS Rule 5). This common fault leads to collisions more often than one would think possible.

The third important cause leading to collisions is the lack of appropriate personnel on the bridge, sometimes due to short carrying of officers or incompetence of some officers, the senior officer may be needed to put long hours on the bridge, hence when conditions are not ideal an even more vigilant and responsible stance should be kept, which sometimes are not kept.

This brings us to other common factors of casualties such as human error, or error in judgment and miscalculation. Although these issues are capable of being dealt with to some extent, by using technological means and constant updating and training of the vessels' personnel, they are difficult to abolish completely.

Another important factor are the errors of charterers or owners of vessels. In the struggle to save fuel, not to put any excess stress on the vessel, or save time on the voyage, they may apply pressure on the navigating crew of the vessel under their command to follow a course that may very well lead to disaster. Although the Master comprehends the danger of such orders and has the knowledge of all the above facts, they show disregard thereof and follow such orders.

It must be kept in mind that a collision will always bring significantly more costs than bunkers expenses by a manoeuvre around a vessel, or even a day's demurrage, in addition to any commercial cost in terms of unreliability in case the goods do not reach their intended destinations, or in case the ship negligently sustains damage while chartered; not to mention any claims for damages by pollution. Complacency builds up when the person in command feels quite secure in the thought that the insurance will cover most, if not all, the costs.

Notwithstanding the Insurance angle, it is still an important issue that casualties at sea are vigorously avoided as not only property but also the lives of the crew members are in danger.

Members are requested to carry out strict audits and ensure that there is a proper risk management in place as far as Navigation practices are concerned.

[illegible]