



South African Maritime Safety Authority

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Lessons Learnt from Recent Casualties

TO ALL SHIP OPERATORS, MASTERS, CREW, SMALL VESSEL SKIPPERS, SMALL VESSEL ASSOCIATIONS AND PRINCIPAL OFFICERS

Summary

A number of serious casualties have occurred over a 6 month period. SAMS is concerned with the seriousness of the contributory factors leading to the casualties, with poor watchkeeping practices and inappropriate use of electronic navigation systems being highlighted in two of the casualties.

For the final casualty SAMS wishes to draw attention to the importance of good housekeeping to ensure freeing ports remain clear at all times.

Casualty 1: Collision between Two Vessels with Subsequent Abandonment and Sinking of One

A vessel A sailed from Cape Town with 14 persons onboard in the evening. In the early hours of the following morning, she was involved in a collision with vessel B. Vessel A started taking on water and the crew successfully abandoned the vessel.

The two vessels had been approaching each other with the vessel B approximately two points to port of the vessel A.

The importance of both proper watchkeeping principles and compliance with the Merchant Shipping (Collision and Distress Signals) regulations, 2005, are highlighted as follows:

1. Vessel A initially altered course to port for a vessel crossing from port. This is in contravention of Rule 8(a) (Any action taken to avoid collision shall be taken in accordance with the Rules of this Part and shall, if the circumstances of the case admit, be positive, made in ample time and with due regard to the observance of good seamanship) as the action was not in accordance with the Rules.
2. Vessel A did not maintain her course and speed, thereby contravening Rule 17 (a)(i) (Where one of two vessels is to keep out of the way, the other shall keep her course and speed)
3. Vessel A contravened Rule 7(a) (Every vessel shall use all available means appropriate to the prevailing circumstances and conditions to determine if risk of collision exists. If there is any doubt such risk shall be deemed to exist).
4. Vessel A contravened Rule 17 (b) (When, from any cause, the vessel required to keep her course and speed finds herself so close that collision cannot be avoided by the action of the give-way vessel alone, she shall take such action as will best aid to avoid collision).
5. Vessel A appeared as a target on Vessel B's radar at a range of 3.88nm, but was only acquired at 1.79 Nm. Vessel B failed to keep a proper lookout as required by Rule 5 (Every vessel shall at all times maintain a proper look-out by sight and hearing as well as by all available means appropriate in the prevailing circumstances and conditions so as to make a full appraisal of the situation and of the risk of collision).
6. Vessel B failed to take early action as required by Rule 8 (f) (A vessel which, by any of these Rules, is required not to impede the passage or safe passage of another vessel shall, when required by the circumstances of the case, take early action to allow sufficient sea room for the safe passage of the other vessel)

7. Vessel B contravened Rule 7(b)(Proper use shall be made of radar equipment if fitted and operational, including long-range scanning to obtain early warning of risk of collision and radar plotting or equivalent systematic observation of detected objects) as Vessel A's target was not acquired and plotted until 1.79nm.
8. Vessel B initially only ordered ten degrees of helm. This is in contravention of Rule 8(a)(b)(d) as early action to avoid collision shall be positive, made in ample time, be large enough to be readily apparent and result in passing at a safe distance.
9. The radars on Vessel B were not correctly set up. This was evidenced by the poor target imagery and the low gain setting on the radar. Once the Master came to the bridge, the gain was increased and the picture improved. In the moments leading up to the collision, the radar range scale in use was inappropriate at 12 nm. This is a contravention of Rule 7(b) (Proper use shall be made of radar equipment if fitted and operational, including long-range scanning to obtain early warning of risk of collision and radar plotting or equivalent systematic observation of detected objects).
10. Vessel B failed to maintain a proper lookout as required in Rule 5.
11. Vessel B prioritized monitoring of AIS targets, contravening Rule 7(a) (Every vessel shall use all available means appropriate to the prevailing circumstances and conditions to determine if risk of collision exists. If there is any doubt such risk shall be deemed to exist).
12. Vessel B considered itself as navigating in restricted visibility, but no sound signals were sounded as required by Rule 35.

Casualty 2: Foundering of a Small Pleasure Yacht with Subsequent Loss of Life

A small pleasure yacht with three persons onboard sailed in the evening, intending an overnight passage to the next port. In the early hours of the morning the vessel foundered on rocks close inshore. Two lives were lost in this incident.

The inquiry found:

1. The steering magnetic compass was not operational and had not been for some time. Regulation 7 (Annexure 2)(1) Safety item No. 22 of the Merchant Shipping National Small Vessel Regulations as amended, requires a 'suitable steering magnetic compass'.
2. Over reliance was placed on only one method of navigation, namely the electronic chart plotter. Verification and confirmation of position through cross reference of methods and paper chart plotting was not used.
3. The auto pilot and electronic chart plotter were not corrected.
4. A proper hand-over between watches was not properly conducted.
5. A proper lookout "by sight and hearing as well as by all available means" as required by rule 5 of the international Collision Regulations was not maintained.

All of the above factors contributed to a deficiency in situational awareness.

Casualty 3: Abandonment of a Fishing Vessel with Subsequent Loss of Life

A fishing vessel was trawling when the weather deteriorated significantly. The gear was retrieved while crew continued to work fish on the open factory deck. The vessels course was altered to put the weather on the stern. In the late afternoon, an accumulation of water was noted on the port main deck. A decision was made to alter course to stem the weather.

As the vessels course was being altered, a swell came onboard from the side. The vessel rolled but did not recover and 'hung' in that position. A second swell followed the first, with the vessel remaining heavily listed. The port passageway on the main deck was filled with water. Shortly thereafter, with the main engine having stopped due to low LO pressure caused by the list, the decision was made to abandon ship. A number of seafarers lost their lives while in the water waiting for rescue.

The abandoned vessel was subsequently towed into port, having righted herself overnight.

1. The inquiry found that the loose gear blocking the freeing ports, reducing the amount of water that could drain from the main deck, may have been a contributory factor in the vessel not immediately coming upright
2. The decision of whether or not to remain onboard in a distress situation should be carefully considered as in some circumstances, remaining onboard even in dire circumstances, may be the best option.
3. The seawater temperature in the area of the casualty was reported as being approximately 16 degrees Celsius. Expected survival time in water of this temperature is subject to a number of variables such as sea state, air temperature, fitness, in-water competence, seasickness and dehydration etc. Survival time may be as little as 1 hour.

To improve chances of survival, vessel owners are strongly advised to disseminate the following two IMO Circulars to all their vessels and ensure the crew are familiar with the contents:

1. MSC.1/Circ.1185 / Rev.1 30 November 2012 / **GUIDE FOR COLD WATER SURVIVAL**
2. MSC.1/Circ.1182/Rev.1/ 21 November 2014 / **GUIDE TO RECOVERY TECHNIQUES**

Circulars are available on the IMO Website.

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