

Republic of the Marshall Islands

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MARINE SAFETY ADVISORY NO. 123-10

To: Regional Marine Safety Offices, Nautical Inspectors, Masters, Owners/Agents

Subject: IMPROVING SITUATIONAL PREPAREDNESS WHEN PROCEEDING THROUGH OR APPROACHING AND DEPARTING FAR EAST PORTS, ANCHORAGES AND INLAND WATERWAYS

Date: 10 December 2010

A review and analysis of investigation reports of serious and very serious collisions, allisions and groundings involving Marshall Islands-flagged ships indicates that situational preparedness improvements may be necessary for vessels transiting the Far East Asia region.

The following causal factors were consistently identified by the Administrator:

- Improper, if any, navigation lights, including incorrect lantern sectors, or poorly mounted and damaged lanterns.
- Contravention of the International Regulations for Preventing Collision at Sea, 1972 (COLREGS '72).
- Improper or insufficient knowledge of local navigation by-laws.
- Lack of preparedness and therefore ability to take collision avoidance actions when local vessels suddenly emerged from the radar shadow of larger ships.
- Lack of preparedness when navigating within in-land waterways placing d vessels into extremely close-quarters/conditions during meeting situations.
- Failure to make effective use of Automatic Identification System (AIS) information to identify and distinguish less-maneuverable ocean-going ships from fishing vessels when approaching areas known for the presence of heavy concentrations of local fishing vessels; wrongly-assuming all other vessels in the area are fishing vessels; and, using non-specific VHF radio transmissions to arrange for meeting and crossing situations, which may not be answered, resulting in either collisions or close quarters situations with other ocean going vessels.

- Failure to comply with Rule 8 of COLREGS, taking small and inconsequential course changes rather than taking early and substantial actions in order to keep well clear of the other vessel.
- Failure to fully appreciate the level of risk created with deciding to overtake another vessel in a crowded traffic separation scheme (TSS), including a failure to consider how the over-taken vessel may not be aware of smaller coastal vessels previously hidden from each ship's radars, and/or overshadowed by the presence of larger contacts and high-density of vessel traffic.
- Ineffective voyage planning, including voyage plans that put an emphasis on reducing transit time by planning passages that do not provide adequate sea room in the vicinity of charted hazards whose positions are based on dated hydrographic information.

The following recommendations are offered to enhance bridge team situational preparedness for vessels transiting the Far East Asia region:

1. Increase vigilance when using the radars, Automatic Radar Plotting Aids (ARPA), AIS, and other equipment to detect and identify other vessels as well as to assess the risk of collision in all conditions.
2. Be aware of smaller vessels that can suddenly emerge from the radar shadow of a larger vessel. Ensure look-outs are posted and on the alert for the sudden appearance of smaller vessels that might be obscured by larger vessels.
3. Actively use AIS when endeavoring to contact large ships in preparation for meeting and crossing situations, and perform this communication well in advance of anticipated collision avoidance actions.
4. Do not strictly rely on the VHF-FM radio to identify vessels detected on radar or visually. When making a miscellaneous radio query to another vessel, expect that the query will not be answered. Be prepared for the event when the other vessel may not be able to effectively communicate in a common language, thus wasting valuable collision avoidance time. Be prepared to deal with possible communication issues with local pilots, including preparation to not have to overly or solely rely on a local pilot.
5. Ensure a short plotting interval is maintained when navigating with a pilot.
6. Be prepared to immediately shift to hand-steering when using auto pilot in open waters.
7. Ensure anchors are made ready for immediate use, with the deck crew stationed forward on stand-by for emergency release of the required anchor.
8. Slow down in reduced visibility and when maneuvering in heavy traffic.

9. Increase awareness during night-time transits that local and coastal vessels (tugs and tows, fishing vessels) may not be displaying the required navigation lights. Also, take into account background lighting in way of large cities and industrial areas that may cause visual disorientation.
10. Perform thorough risk assessment and passage-planning, including the identification of plausible areas to anchor (see OPL Singapore); planning for several possible options in the event there is not adequate availability at the original intended area.
11. Carefully review information on charts with understanding and discretion, especially in regions where the plotted positions of navigational hazards are based on historic surveys as well as where there is limited hydrograph detail, e.g., Dinagat Sound, Philippines.
12. When maneuvering to avoid collision, ensure any change of course and/or speed is timely and large enough to be readily apparent to another vessel. If the give way vessel, take early and substantive action to avoid collision as required by Rule 16 of the COLREGS. If the stand on vessel, be prepared to maneuver as allowed by Rule 17 of the COLREGS. **Always have more than one collision avoidance plan of action.**

Conclusion: Regarding collision avoidance actions within these waters, Masters and their ship and commercial managers should view navigation from a high-risk-management-perspective. Owners and operators should review the guidelines in their Safety Management System to ensure that the primary emphasis during voyage planning is ensuring the safety of navigation and that known risks to navigation, such as heavy concentrations of fishing vessels or dated hydrographic information, are addressed. Masters should ensure that their Officer of the Watch (OOW) is familiar with the risks to navigation safety that may be encountered while on watch and are prepared to address the risks in a timely and safe manner.