

SAFE CARGO-HANDLING OPERATIONS ON OFFSHORE SUPPLY VESSELS**Notice to Shipowners, Shipping Agents, Masters and Seamen**

The Department of Transport is concerned about the number of accidents which have occurred on supply vessels and have on occasion resulted in fatalities. Regulation 4 of the Merchant Shipping (General Duties) Regulations places the duty on the employer to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health and safety of employees and other persons on board ship. The Department of Transport has reviewed the situation and draws the attention of all concerned to a number of aspects affecting the safe loading and back-loading operations of supply vessels serving offshore installations:

1. Preplanning of Cargo Stowage

All cargoes carried to and from an installation should be accompanied by a manifest, or bill of lading, identifying the goods in transit and giving details regarding the size, weight, contents and destination(s).

The order of loading, discharging and stowage arrangements should be agreed with the Charterer's onshore representative and/or Offshore Installation Manager (OIM) as appropriate before commencing operations; this being particularly important if more than one offshore installation is involved. The Master should make the final decisions after liaising with the representative or OIM concerned.

For outward cargo the manifest should be sent to the installations concerned as soon as possible after the vessel is loaded. The relevant information should be copied to the person in charge of the loading and unloading activity on the installation.

For inward cargo and empty containers/skips back-loaded from an offshore installation the manifest should be communicated to the supply vessel as soon as possible and preferably before the vessel's arrival at the installation concerned. The Master has the authority to refuse cargo if insufficient information or insufficient notice is given.

2. Dangerous Goods

The carriage of dangerous goods (in bulk, portable tanks and all other types of packages) is governed by the Merchant Shipping (Dangerous Goods) Regulations 1981 (SI 1747) and all concerned are reminded of their obligation to properly declare, package, mark and stow dangerous cargoes and to provide manifests in accordance with the Regulations.

Whenever dangerous goods are being handled copies of the “Blue Book” and IMDG Code should be readily available. Advice on emergency procedures is contained in the IMO booklet “Emergency Procedures for Ships Carrying Dangerous Goods” and medical advice is contained in the chemicals supplement to the Ship Captain’s Medical Guide.

Portable tanks should not be filled or emptied while the tanks remain on board the ship. In addition where dangerous goods are to be carried in bulk the loading and unloading should not be undertaken at the same time as other cargo is being handled and in any event undertaken only as approved and in accordance with written guidelines agreed with the Department.

3. *Marking of Cargo*

All goods carried including containers, skips, pipes, etc, should be so marked as to be readily identifiable from the manifest at all times; the responsibility for so marking rests with the shore agent for outward shipment and the Offshore Installation Manager for inward shipment. It is recommended that markings be clearly visible from the top and the sides. The Master may refuse to load unmarked cargo if he has reason to believe that “dangerous goods” are involved (see 2 above).

4. *Loading and Unloading Operations*

The Master of a supply vessel has overall authority to decide whether or not a particular task involving the safety of his vessel and persons on board should take place. This authority needs to be especially recognised by all concerned in the transfer of equipment, fuel, provisions and other items between supply vessels and offshore installations. These operations can be extremely hazardous, and it is incumbent upon the Master of a supply vessel to exercise caution in deciding the maximum sea state in which such operations can be carried out and give due consideration to the station keeping capability of the vessel at the time.

Sections 1 and 4 of Chapter 31 of the “Code of Safe Working Practices for Merchant Seamen” cover both general and particular aspects of unloading and back-loading operations at an offshore installation. The Department of Transport would emphasise the necessity of carrying out such operations in a safe and seamanlike manner giving particular attention to the following:—

- (a) a good look-out should be kept for imminent on-coming quartering or following seas which may be shipped over the stern;
- (b) crew on deck should wear suitable highly visible protective clothing and equipment in accordance with 1985 SI No. 1664 and its associated ‘M’ Notice;
- (c) “safe shelter” positions should be kept clear for crew working on the open deck;
- (d) each piece of cargo should be released individually as loads are discharged;

- (e) each piece of cargo should be secured on arrival on deck when backloading giving emphasis to the dangers of “piggyback” stowage of skips and the need to secure small loose items of cargo with nets. Parts of non-containerised equipment should be adequately secured at all times;
- (f) off-loading from and back-loading into “slots” should be avoided in any condition other than calm seas;
- (g) deck officer in charge should be able to see all cargo-handling operations and all crew working on the open deck; and able to communicate directly with the ship’s bridge, the crane operator and the person in charge of operations as necessary. Persons in charge should be readily identifiable;
- (h) walkways and access routes should be kept clear and these together with working areas should have adequate non-slip surfaces;
- (i) Offshore Installations Manager should be immediately appraised of:—
 - (i) onset of adverse weather affecting loading or back-loading operations;
 - (ii) accidental discharge of oil, chemicals, fluids etc from the installation affecting loading or back-loading operations;
 - (iii) any incident such as an impact with the installation or fouling of anchors etc.

5. *Suitable Equipment*

In order to provide as safe a working place as possible Owners and Masters should ensure that the vessel is supplied with suitable equipment to facilitate loading and unloading operations; such equipment to include means for quick attachment and quick release of lashings; and means to facilitate “hooking on” and letting go crane whips without climbing on or into containers, etc, wherever possible. Containers should comply with the Freight Containers (Safety Convention) Regulations 1984. Skips and other methods of containing parcels of deck cargo should be provided with suitable lifting, protection and lashing arrangements; bearing in mind the following—cargo should be preslung to facilitate handling; steel to steel contact should be avoided; stanchions should be used wherever possible to assist the securing of articles such as loose pipes; lifting lugs should not protrude so as to interfere with other cargo or lifting operations.

6. *Lifting Equipment*

Lifting equipment includes slings, hooks and attachments. Lifting equipment should be tested and maintained in accordance with the relevant regulations and should be used only in accordance with good practice. Where two or more slings are secured to the same piece of cargo being lifted the angles of the slings should be such as not to permit excessive strain to be placed on any sling.

7. Training and Experience of Crew

Department of Transport "General Duties" Regulations 1984 SI No. 408 place a duty on Owners and Masters to provide such information, instruction, training and supervision as is necessary to ensure, as far as is reasonably practicable, the health and safety of persons aboard ship. Department of Transport Merchant Shipping Notice No. M.781 sets out the minimum crew for the manning of offshore supply vessels and these persons should be competent and experienced as stated; additional crew should be carried in accordance with M Notice 781 when engaged in the transfer of considerable quantities of cargo necessitating extended periods of duty. The Master should ensure that all such crew members are familiar with the intended operation and any special equipment; and that all work proceeds under competent supervision having regard to the safety of personnel and the ship.

8. Application

This notice is primarily directed to persons responsible for cargo-handling operations on supply vessels and those involved in the safety of seamen. A similar notice entitled "Cargo-handling Operations on Offshore Installations" is being issued by the Department of Energy to the owners of offshore installations and their managers.

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