

FISHING ACCIDENT FLYER

VESSEL LOST FOLLOWING A FIRE

Narrative



A 20m wooden fishing vessel suffered an engine room fire, thought to be caused by a fault in the electrical system. The emergency engine and fuel shut off systems did not operate correctly, and the engine had to be stopped by fouling the propeller with a rope. The fire was severe, and with dense smoke escaping from the engine room, the skipper sent a “Mayday” and evacuated his crew to the liferaft. They were all safely rescued by a nearby fishing vessel responding to the “Mayday” call.

A supply vessel also responded to the “Mayday” and fought the fire with a powerful foam monitor. The smoke died down and it appeared that the fire had been extinguished, so the master of the supply vessel suggested that the skipper reboard his boat to check the damage. Concerned that the flames could re-ignite, or that the boat could suddenly capsize as a result of the weight of the water used to fight the fire, the Coastguard recommended that no-one go back on board.

The weather conditions were good, and there was no smoke coming from the boat, so the master repeated his suggestion to the skipper to reboard. The skipper agreed and took the mate with him. Wearing their immersion suits and carrying a torch and portable VHF radio, they looked over their boat while the supply vessel’s fast rescue boat (FRC) stood by.

Smoke from the wheelhouse had dispersed, and down below the galley appeared undamaged. The mate entered the cabin and saw where fire had damaged the starboard side. He went forward to the engine room door and cracked it open. Thick smoke and noxious gases escaped and the skipper pulled the mate clear. They waited on the upper deck for a few minutes and then returned to the engine room. The smoke had now cleared, enabling the mate to go into the engine room, where he heard a crackle and then saw a glow of fire in the far corner.

The skipper and mate evacuated to the upper deck and managed to rig a tow line as the fire escalated. The fishing gear was cut away and the crew returned to the supply vessel in the FRC.

Over the next few hours, the supply vessel fought the fire, while towing the fishing boat clear of sub sea pipelines in the area, until satisfied that the fire was finally extinguished. The tow was passed to another fishing vessel and the supply vessel returned to standby duties.

All seemed well as they towed towards port, with the boat having a small list and sitting only slightly lower in the water than normal. However, in the early hours of the following morning, the vessel broke her tow and sank.

The Lessons

1. Electrical systems and insulation material should be checked carefully to minimise the risk of fire.
2. Emergency engine and fuel system shut down arrangements should be tested regularly and repaired if they do not operate correctly.
3. Engine rooms should be checked to ensure that they can be fully closed down in a fire situation to prevent smoke spreading and to give CO₂ drench systems the maximum chance of success.
4. Do not put yourself back into danger by returning to the scene of a fire too soon. Re-opening a compartment causes air to enter, which can then allow a fire to re-ignite. Engine room fires may require many hours to cool before re-entry can be safely made. Compartment re-entry should be attempted by properly trained firefighters with the correct fire-fighting equipment and breathing apparatus.



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