

SYNOPSIS

On 28 January 2009, the chief officer on board the UK registered container ship *Ville de Mars* fell almost 8m when descending into a water ballast tank. The vessel was on passage in the Gulf of Oman. He was removed from the tank by the ship's crew and died while being flown to a hospital ashore in Oman by a Royal Navy helicopter. The chief officer had been due to leave the vessel the following day in Jebel Ali, UAE. No postmortem was conducted.

The chief officer was not wearing a fall arrestor as he entered the ballast tank, and it is almost certain he slipped and fell from an un-guarded stringer. The precautions taken in preparation for his entry into the tank did not comply with the requirements of company procedures or industry practice. No permits to enter into an enclosed space or to work at height were issued. Although non compliance with the permit to work system had previously been identified during a company internal audit, no effective remedial action had been taken.

This is one of an increasing number of accidents which have resulted from complacency. Preventing this kind of behaviour at sea, where ship owners and managers are frequently thousands of miles from their vessels, is a huge challenge.

A recommendation has been made to CMA CGM Group aimed at identifying ways of combating complacency and instilling a positive safety culture on board its ships. It also aims to ensure that the methods identified are shared with the industry via the MCA's Human Element Advisory Group. A further recommendation has been made to CMA CGM Group aimed at improving the effectiveness of its internal vessel audit regime.