

SYNOPSIS

On the evening of 7 June 2006, the general cargo ship *Skagern* and the container ship *Samskip Courier* collided in the Humber estuary in dense fog. Fortunately there were no injuries on either vessel. *Samskip Courier* sustained minor damage to her bow but was able to continue on her voyage to Rotterdam. *Skagern* was extensively damaged forward and required major repairs.

Both vessels had experienced pilots on board at the time of the accident, and *Skagern* in particular was a regular visitor to Hull.

Skagern arrived at Spurn light float, where she embarked her pilot at 2100. A master/pilot exchange of information was carried out and the vessel proceeded inbound towards King George Dock, Hull, at speeds of up to 11.5kts. Visibility was moderate, but it soon deteriorated, and at times dropped to less than a cable.

At 21:30, *Samskip Courier* embarked a pilot at King George Dock, and after leaving the dock proceeded seaward at speeds of up to 12.5kts, in thick fog.

The two pilots were aware that the vessels would meet each other at some point; they had talked to each other on mobile telephones, and VTS also informed them of each other's location. The vessels acquired each other on radar when some 2 miles apart, as they closed at a combined speed of over 23kts in visibility of as little as 1 cable. Neither vessel plotted the other on radar as they converged.

VHF radio communications between the two pilots, together with the radar images, revealed that the vessels were on a collision course. The subsequent attempts at emergency avoidance were unsuccessful, and the ships collided, head-on.

Samskip Courier sustained relatively little damage and was able to proceed to anchorage at the mouth of the Humber. However, *Skagern's* bow and collision bulkhead were both penetrated, and she started to sink as she attempted to reach King George Dock. To prevent the vessel from sinking in the channel, the master and pilot manoeuvred *Skagern* onto a mid-stream sandbank with the help of a tug. After further damage assessment, another tug was attached and *Skagern* was towed astern into King George Dock, where her bow then sank and settled on the basin bed before she could be emptied of her cargo.

MAIB inspectors visited both vessels and, as part of their investigation, were able to retrieve data from *Samskip Courier's* Voyage Data Recorder (VDR).

The ensuing investigation identified contributing factors to the accident; these included:

- Failure to apply long established collision avoidance methods by the masters and pilots of both vessels.
- Pilot /master relationships: the masters' over reliance on the pilots.
- Poor interaction and communications among the bridge teams.
- Loss of situational awareness by *Samskip Courier's* pilot.
- The positioning of Sand End light float.
- Use of mobile telephones on the bridge.

Recommendations:

Recommendations have been made to the Port Marine Safety Code Steering Group, Associated British Ports Humber Estuary Services and the International Chamber of Shipping with reference to: improving pilot/master interaction; the appropriate use of mobile telephones and the importance of safe speeds.

Figure 1



Samskip Courier

Figure 2



Skagern