

SYNOPSIS



On Saturday 15 December 2001, at 0151 UTC, Humber Coastguard notified the Marine Accident Investigation Branch (MAIB) that the general cargo vessel *Rosebank* was on fire and had been abandoned by her crew about 7 miles east of Alnmouth, off the Northumberland coast. A rescue helicopter airlifted all the crew off the vessel, and took them ashore. The situation was monitored by an RN vessel alongside, and a salvage vessel. The MAIB investigation started 2 days later when the vessel was towed into the River Tyne and brought alongside.

Rosebank, a UK-registered 1213gt general cargo vessel, operated with a crew of five and traded between ports in the UK, Ireland, and the Continent. The crew consisted of the master, mate, chief engineer, AB, and cook/AB. *Rosebank* had been purchased by new owners in October, was fully certificated and in class, with an experienced master and chief engineer on board.

Rosebank sailed from Berth 13, King George Quay, Dundee at 1315 on 14 December after completing loading at 1200. Her cargo consisted of bagged and palletised bags of NPK fertiliser and calcium nitrate for a two-port discharge in the Channel Islands of Guernsey and Jersey. After passing the fairway buoy at 1500, the mate took over the watch while the master went below. On entering the galley, the master was told that a power socket was not working and, after confirming this, he went below to the engine room to find the chief engineer. He found him working on boiler maintenance in the workshop. Both then attempted to trace the fault, but found nothing. The master returned to his cabin.

At 1800 the master took over the watch. At 2050, the master and chief engineer carried out a routine inspection of the accommodation and provision room areas. Nothing unusual was seen or smelt. At 2200 the master smelt smoke on the bridge and called the crew. While the remainder of the crew assembled on the poop deck, the chief engineer checked the engine room. While he went forward to start the fire pump, the cook/AB collected the SCBA set, put it on, and went to check the provision room via the engine room. He reported there was a fire in that area and then proceeded to fight it using the engine room 45kg CO₂ extinguisher. The chief officer and the chief engineer began boundary-cooling the deck above, while the other AB assisted the cook/AB.

The fire was knocked down, but it re-ignited as soon as the CO₂ ran out. The paint store above the provision room also caught fire, but the chief officer managed to extinguish it using a fire hose. The re-ignited fire spread into the accommodation and the crew were unable to contain it. The master had informed the coastguard of the fire and they had issued a "Mayday" on his behalf. With the fire out of control, the master was forced to say that they would have to abandon the vessel. By then, a helicopter was in attendance, and all five were airlifted off to hospital, suffering from smoke inhalation.

It is recommended that the MCA reviews the requirement which allows the continued use of smoke helmet/smoke masks in place of SCBA sets.