

SYNOPSIS



Stena Explorer is a high-speed catamaran capable of carrying up to 1500 passengers and 375 cars or freight at 40 knots.

The incident happened when the vessel was entering Holyhead harbour on 20 September 2001. There were 551 passengers on board and 56 crew. Visibility was good, the wind was 12 to 14 knots north-westerly and the sea state was calm in the sheltered waters.

At 1800, as she was proceeding astern, about 350m from the linkspan, the fire alarm sounded, indicating a fire in the port auxiliary engine room.

About 30 seconds after the fire alarm sounded, the vessel's entire CCTV system failed. Normally, the master used images from the CCTV cameras mounted on the stern, to position the vessel on the linkspan.

The chief engineer activated the water Hi-fog fire-fighting system in the area of the fire and requested permission from the master to shut down the port pontoon. However, the master decided not to do this until the vessel was fully lined up into the approach to the linkspan.

At 1806, the vessel was secured in the linkspan, and the passengers were evacuated safely and efficiently. The fire brigade attended 10 minutes later and, on the request of the fire chief, non-essential personnel were evacuated. At 1848, the fire brigade confirmed that the fire was extinguished.

The fire was caused by the failure of a compression fitting on an element of the fuel piping of the aft generator in the port pontoon. This failure allowed gas oil to be pumped out over the running engine, where it came into contact with the exposed hot surface of the engine's turbo-charger unit, and was ignited.

The accident highlights the dangers associated with the continued use of compression fittings in the fuel systems of diesel engines.

The failure of the CCTV system, and the issues surrounding headcounting procedures, have been addressed by Stena Line as a result of its own investigation into the fire.

A plastic free-standing lubricating oil storage tank was noticed during the investigation. A recommendation regarding this tank's compliance with the regulations has been made.

Further recommendations have been made with regard to the continued use of compression fittings in fuel lines of diesel engines.