

THE OPERATIONAL CONTROL OF WATERTIGHT DOORS IN PASSENGER SHIPS

Notice to Shipowners, Masters and Chief Engineers of Passenger Ships

The Court of Formal Investigation* into a recent casualty involving a passenger ferry made a number of recommendations, one of which expressed the view that the practice of closing watertight doors at sea should comply with Regulation 3 of the Merchant Shipping (Closing of Openings in Hulls and in Watertight Bulkheads) Regulations 1980. (SI 1980 No. 540). This regulation states that when a passenger ship proceeds to sea the master shall ensure that every watertight door (not being a door fitted in a watertight bulkhead dividing cargo between deck spaces) shall be kept closed while the ship is at sea, except when it is required to be open for the working of the ship.

On the question of door closure the Court found (paras 21.40 and 21.41 of the Report) that:

“The current practice of indiscriminately keeping all doors in machinery spaces open in clear visibility cannot be justified”; and also

“The threat to the watertight integrity of a vessel fitted with power operated doors of a collision is not, in clear visibility, sufficient to justify a practice of indiscriminately keeping all watertight doors closed except when required to be open for the working of the ship.”

It is considered essential that Shipowners and Masters take careful note of these findings and also that they take what measures they consider necessary to provide against the possibility of progressive flooding through open watertight doors in the event of collision or grounding.

Shipowners should therefore examine the present arrangements in their ships and provide each master with instructions relating to the operational control of all the watertight doors fitted in his ship. The objective of these instructions being to ensure the highest practicable degree of watertight subdivision having regard to the risks of collision or grounding on different parts of the route, which may be affected by the prevailing or forecast weather conditions, and to the practical difficulties of ensuring:

- (a) the effective monitoring and safe operation of machinery;
- (b) the safety of the persons using the doors;
- (c) the maintenance of satisfactory conditions of habitability in passenger and crew spaces below the bulkhead deck, and
- (d) the efficient working of the ancillary services.

* Report of Court No. 8072 published by HMSO.

The Department intends to amend the “closure of openings” regulations as appropriate. In the meantime, shipowners are hereby invited to discuss with the Department any problems they encounter when assessing the operational control procedures for the watertight doors in any of their ships.

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