

Republic of the Marshall Islands

MARITIME ADMINISTRATOR

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MARINE SAFETY ADVISORY No. 16-23

To: Owners/Operators, Masters, Nautical Inspectors, Recognized Organizations

Subject: NAVIGATION WATCHKEEPING – OBSERVATIONS AND LESSONS LEARNED

Date: 1 November 2023

This Marine Safety Advisory shares important observations and lessons learned to improve navigational watchkeeping. They are based on a review conducted by the Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI) Maritime Administrator (the “Administrator”) into 11 collisions involving RMI-registered vessels. The collisions occurred between 2018 and 2023, were determined to be very serious marine casualties, and resulted in the loss of 20 lives and nine vessels.

1.0 Administrator Observations and Lessons Learned

1.1 Officers of the Watch (OOWs):

- .1 must take pride in how they stand watch, always remembering that their primary responsibility is ensuring the safety of the lives on board the ship, and those at sea;
- .2 ensure they are always supported by other Bridge Watchstanders;
- .3 ensure Bridge Watchstanders maintain high standards by validating and constantly checking their performance and engaging with them to ensure shared understanding of the navigational situation; and
- .4 never hesitate to call the Master for additional support and advice.

1.2 Masters:

- .1 are ultimately responsible for ensuring their ship is navigated safely;
- .2 should not prioritize other tasks on board over adequately supporting the OOW during all conditions of navigation;
- .3 must continually train Bridge Watchstanders for different conditions of navigation;
- .4 must not compromise Bridge watchstanding resources when planning work activity on board, no matter the urgency.

This MSA is evaluated annually by the Administrator and expires one year after its issuance or renewal unless otherwise noted, superseded, or revoked.

- .5 must ensure that between sunset and sunrise, in addition to an OOW, a Lookout is stationed on the Bridge, at a minimum;
- .6 must hold Bridge Watchstanders accountable by holding standards high, constantly validating and checking safety of navigation, and engaging with them; ask the difficult questions.
- .7 ensure that Bridge Watchstanders understand that any deviation from COLREGS, regulations, rules, and procedures can result in the loss of life, the loss of a vessel, or marine pollution; and must be dealt with and learned from;
- .8 must prepare Bridge Watchstanders for difficult passages, high traffic-density areas, and the presence of fishing vessels; and
- .9 must conduct regular COLREGS training and assessment to ensure full understanding and application of the Rules.

1.3 Bridge Watchstanders:

- .1 look out the window; acquire, verify, and monitor contacts bearing drift visually and on radar (use true and relative motion to assess vectors). Remember that not all vessels are equipped with AIS;
- .2 not expect that vessels will maneuver as required by COLREGS;
- .3 ensure, as required by COLREGS, that early and substantial action is taken to keep clear of another vessel;
- .4 understand that any change of course or speed to avoid a collision must be readily apparent to watchstanders on other vessels;
- .5 apply extra caution when navigating near fishing vessels; and
- .6 use hand steering when maneuvering to avoid a collision.

2.0 Administrator Advice

2.1 Shipowners and Operators:

- .1 review, and as necessary, revise their navigation watchstanding procedures and guidance to ensure that it:
 - establishes clear expectations for Masters, OOWs, and other Bridge Watchstanders; and
 - incorporates the above lessons learned and that they are used for on-joining briefings with Masters.

2.2 Masters:

- .1 review, and as necessary revise, their Standing Orders, taking the lessons learned into account;
- .2 review and discuss these learnings with all Bridge Watchstanders; and
- .3 personally evaluate the experience of Bridge Watchstanders in different navigational situations (e.g., traffic separation zones, hours of darkness, coastal waters, areas with high traffic density or concentrations of fishing vessels, etc.) and assess the abilities of newly signed on OOWs before permitting them to stand watch.