

# BULK CARRIER SAFETY

**Fact:** Bulk carriers, designed and built to relevant IMO standards and Classification specification, properly inspected, maintained and operated in accordance with IMO and industry standards are safe, reliable, and have a life expectancy of more than 20 years provided they remain undamaged.

**Fact:** When bulk carriers are loaded with dense and heavy cargoes such as iron, dense ores or steel products they rely on large empty spaces in holds, ballast tanks, voids and forward spaces as reserve buoyancy to stay afloat. If seawater enters any of these spaces due to damaged hull, hatches, accesses, ventilators or airpipes, the vessel can lose buoyancy and sink very quickly.

**Fact:** Many seafarers have lost their lives when bulk carriers have sunk because they did not have enough time to evacuate the vessel, and on a number of occasions vessels have sunk so fast that not even distress signals were sent out.

## Advice:

- Crews should be very aware of any damage to the ship's hull, hatches or deck fittings. Such damage can be caused by contact with dockside or tugs; by impact from cargo gear such as tractors and grabs; by damage from corrosion (often accelerated by the chemical actions of certain cargoes); by sloshing forces from ballast; by swinging anchors hitting the hull; or by any damage to hatches by seas, equipment or poor maintenance.
- Crews should be aware that any loss of buoyancy in forward spaces due to flooding will reduce the freeboard forward and dramatically increase the forces of extreme weather on hull structures and hatches. If a ship takes on an unusual trim or heel, or if her motions become changed, breach of the hull should be suspected immediately. Visual signs of trouble can include unusual collection of water on decks or dislodged hatch covers.
- On vessels fitted with Water Ingress Detection System (WIDS), in the event of a (WIDS) alarm, muster all personnel at the abandon ship stations with the exception of those crew members investigating the alarm and those keeping systems running, and notify authorities of Distress. In the event of a second alarm warning of flooding to a greater depth, ensure that all personnel are recalled and sent to abandon ship stations. Flooding aboard a bulker can be more dangerous than fire and the crew should be fully drilled to carry out evacuation procedures urgently when the (WIDS) alarm sounds.
- In the event of a collision, the Master should call the ship's personnel to emergency stations with a strong emphasis on preparing to evacuate the ship.
- Boats, liferafts or other life-saving craft must not be launched unless the specific order to do so has been given by the Master. The decision to evacuate should be based on knowledge that the vessel is truly sinking, the depth of water is deeper than the depth of the hull, and the speed of sinking might prevent later launching.



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