

Vessel contact during materiel transfer in adverse weather

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One vessel lost heading and position control because of the strong winds and swell, pushing it toward another.

What happened?

During a transfer-at-sea of materials between two vessels, laying alongside one another, the weather and sea conditions began to rapidly deteriorate. One vessel lost heading and position control because of the strong winds and swell, pushing it toward the other. Because the cargo sling was still connected, neither vessel could safely manoeuvre away. The two vessels made contact at their sterns, causing structural damage to both.

What went right?

- Deck crew immediately inspected the hull and fenders, documenting the damage photographically.
- The Master conducted a timely onboard safety debrief with the crew.
- The incident was promptly reported to the shore management team.

What went wrong?

- No-one thought to “call it a day” and stop.
 - Operations continued past safe operational limits despite visibly deteriorating weather.
 - Neither Master exercised authority in suspending operations when position-keeping became marginal.
- Bridge Resource Management (BRM) was ineffective; there was a breakdown in mutual situational awareness and proactive decision-making between both bridges.
- The risk assessment lacked specific, measurable weather triggers (e.g., maximum wind/wave limits) for stopping work.

What are the lessons?

- Safety always takes priority over commercial considerations: No operational deadline nor client requirement supersedes vessel and crew safety.
- Ensure it is clearly understood that everyone has authority to stop unsafe

IOGP Life Saving Rules:



Bypassing safety controls



Work authorisation

operations – STOP WORK authority lies with everyone, from the vessel Masters to the crew working on deck.

- It is important to establish, before operations begin, a clear understanding of responsibility and authority, particularly when two or more vessels, two or more companies, or different departments, have to work together to complete a task.
- Keep a “weather eye” on the situation around you - don’t get distracted or drawn into operational details.
- In potentially hazardous and complex multi-vessel operations like this, have a clear understanding of what the operational “red lines” are that must not be crossed. When it’s time to stop – STOP.

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