

Notifications 202403
Monday, December 16, 2024

Cargo stowage failures on the rise off South Africa

Dear Members:

Many ships are avoiding the Red Sea by sailing around South Africa exposing them to unforgiving seas around the Cape. With several incidents of cargo stowage failure and container losses in the region recently there are fears of more to come.

The last few months of the southern hemisphere winter have seen some severe weather conditions off the Cape of Good Hope, and we have seen several incidents occurring. The area has a reputation for stormy confused seas, large swells and rogue waves, which pose extra risks for ships and their crews. Sadly, there have been recent fatalities among crew working on deck and who have been struck by waves in heavy weather off the Cape.

Cargo stows on container, bulk, vehicle and general cargo vessels are particularly vulnerable to more extreme rolling and pitching. Stowage failures can lead to more than cargo damage - they can lead to structural damage, fires and may also cause the ship to list, compromising stability and potentially disabling the ship.

Cargo that falls overboard can also endanger other vessels at sea and there is inevitably an environmental impact from cargo that sinks or ends up washing ashore as debris.

Recommendations

The vessel's Safety Management System will set out procedures and measures to be taken in preparation for the extra risks posed by heavy weather. Lashings may need checking as they may have slackened during the voyage. However, it is important that such checks are done in good time and safe conditions. If a stow failure does occur it may also be unsafe to send the crew into cargo areas to try and re-secure it until safer conditions permit.

Approaching heavy weather, the crew also needs to be mindful of more than the cargo. There have been high profile instances of a complete engine blackout caused by low engine lubrication oil pressure. Heavy seas can cause movements in the lubrication oil tanks so large that the supply to the lubricating oil pumps stops. That can trigger an alarm indicating a low level of lubrication oil, which in turn can cause an automatic shutdown of the engines. This can put ships in an extremely vulnerable position and if the vessel is exposed to extreme rolling from beam on seas, the forces may exceed design strengths leading to lashing failures. If the crew are unable to take timely steps onboard to avoid a more perilous situation, seeking external assistance should not be delayed to gain early control of the situation.

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