

Shippers and charterers must play their part in stopping liquefaction: Intercargo



Liquefaction is a major problem for dry bulk shipping. "Crew and owners are concerned and want to tackle the problem, but charterers and shippers must also do their share to deal with the problem," says John Platsidakis, Intercargo chairman.

He noted nine bulk carriers and 111 seafarers have been lost since 2010 in incidents involving the carrying of cargoes that have liquefied and more losses are anticipated.

"Loss of the Bulk Jupiter [in January] resulted in a very thorough investigation and report by the flag state The Bahamas, but we must note the shippers and charterers were uncooperative in the investigation and we do expect another loss," said Platsidakis speaking to a group of journalists prior to Intercargo's agm in Athens, on 13 October.

Shippers and charterers must play their part in ensuring cargoes are safe for carriage, said Platsidakis. He said Intercargo has achieved success through IMO towards improved testing and verification of the cargo carriage conditions for solid dry cargoes and is committed to working with IMO, the IG group of P&I clubs and other industry stakeholders to improve the safety of shipping in the dry bulk sector.

However, "it is only by correctly identifying and addressing the cause of such casualties that the loss of lives and ships can be addressed," Intercargo said.

The bulk carrier owners' association is also critical of how long it takes for flag states to produce casualty reports.

"Reports are only produced when there is loss of life and the average is 20 months from casualty to report, by which time the incident is only a memory," said Platsidakis, adding "The Bahamas needs to be congratulated on its report into the Bulk Jupiter".

The Bahamas probe concluded liquefaction was the likely cause of the tragedy, which claimed 18 lives in January off the coast of Vietnam.

Intercargo says the flag state performance for the casualty investigation of bulk carrier losses over the past 10 years "is generally woefully inadequate", with only 24 reports submitted to IMO for 69 losses.

"The shipper is responsible for ensuring a safe cargo is loaded," said Dimitrios J Fafalios, chairman of the body's technical committee. "It is the shipper not the flag state who has to get verification the cargo is safe".

Fafalios explained dry cargoes "change phase from the mine to its ultimate destination" depending of the amount of fines [powder] and moisture in the cargo. All cargoes have to be tested and verified before they are loaded, and some of this verification is inaccurate.

Shippers must take their responsibilities seriously and understand the impact of their actions. Lives are lost and even one lost life is too many," said Fafalios.

Intercargo says: "It is only when we get full transparency and cooperation from the shippers with accurate shippers declarations on the composition of bulk cargoes will we be able to fully identify and mitigate the risks involved for the safe carriage of cargoes and assure the protection of our seafarers."

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