

Media Release – 03 September 2018

On the “M/V Cheshire Casualty Investigation Report”

In August 2017, the 2012 built supramax bulk carrier M/V CHESHIRE, en route from Norway to Thailand, fully loaded with cargo declared by the shipper as being “Ammonium Nitrate Based Fertilizer (Non-hazardous)” and not liable to self-sustaining decomposition, suffered cargo decomposition that led to rising temperatures in the cargo holds and the generation of toxic gases. The decomposition progressed throughout the length of the vessel to such an extent that, after several days, the vessel’s Master took the decision to evacuate the crew. The vessel was then left to drift under the supervision of the Spanish Authorities until being salvaged, but in the end, due to extensive damage, the vessel was declared a constructive total loss.

The importance of investigating an incident and the subsequent publication of a casualty report cannot be overstated, as identifying the causes of accidents enables corrective actions to be put in place. INTERCARGO would like to commend the Isle of Man Ship Registry, the Flag Administration of the vessel, for the timely publication and the clarity of the Casualty Investigation Report of the M/V CHESHIRE.

The report makes some important recommendations including: amending the misleading cargo name from “Ammonium Nitrate Based Fertilizer (non-hazardous)” to “Ammonium Nitrate Based Fertilizer (not otherwise classified)”, the fertilizer manufacturers to provide further information on the behaviour and carriage of this cargo, and consideration of whether the current IMO-stipulated test for assessment of self-sustaining decomposition properties of an ammonium nitrate based fertilizer is adequate.

Ammonium Nitrate Based Fertilizer (non-hazardous) is currently designated in the IMSBC Code as a group C cargo. These are cargoes that do not liquefy (group A) nor possess chemical hazards (group B). It is clear from this incident that this cargo, or at least some of the ammonium nitrate based fertilizers shipped as this cargo, should not be treated as group C. It is INTERCARGO’s hope that future work at the IMO will lead to the correct designation and description of this cargo within the IMSBC Code, thus furthering the safer carriage of cargoes and safer voyages.

Other recommendations in the report include: the provision of specialist equipment onboard the vessel, monitoring of the cargo atmosphere by the crew, and the development of cargo and ship specific procedures related to the carriage of this cargo. It is INTERCARGO’s strong opinion that these additional precautions, which are being called upon to be the responsibility of the vessel, ought to be unnecessary if the cargo is group C.

The IMSBC Code, which is mandatory under SOLAS, stipulates that the Shipper should provide the vessel with all the appropriate information that enables a cargo to be carried safely. It is INTERCARGO’s belief that accurate cargo information, provided by the shipper, is the cornerstone for the safe carriage of bulk cargoes.

About INTERCARGO: The International Association of Dry Cargo Shipowners (INTERCARGO) is a voluntary non-profit association representing the interests of dry cargo vessel owners. Its first General Meeting took place in 1980 in London and it has had NGO consultative status at the International Maritime Organization (IMO) since 1993. INTERCARGO provides the forum where quality dry bulk shipowners, managers and operators are informed about, discuss and share concerns on key topics and regulatory challenges, especially in relation to safety, the environment and operational excellence. INTERCARGO promotes best practices in shipping and represents dry cargo shipping interests at IMO, other industry fora and the broader business context, basing its strategies on the principle of free and fair competition.

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