

NORTH AND SHIPOWNERS' P&I CLUBS WARN OF POTENTIALLY LETHAL REFRIGERATION GAS RISKS ON FISHING VESSELS

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The 175 million GT, 'A' rated North P&I Club has joined forces with the Shipowners' Club to publish a technical loss prevention briefing on how to minimise potentially lethal gas risks arising from poor operation and maintenance of refrigeration systems on fishing vessels. Both North, particularly since its merger with Sunderland Marine in February 2014, and Shipowners' are leading liability insurers to the global fishing industry.

According to Craig McBurnie, underwriting manager at Sunderland Marine, 'Refrigeration systems are installed and used on a large number of fishing vessels worldwide. The sizes of these plants vary depending on purpose and application, but they can be on an almost industrial scale, particularly on vessels which freeze or process their catch on board.'

'Unfortunately there have been numerous incidents involving these refrigeration systems in the past decade, mostly relating to uncontrolled escape of potentially toxic refrigerant gases. Many of these incidents have resulted in serious injuries, some fatal, to fishing vessel crew members and shore-based workers.'

North's loss prevention executive Alvin Forster says, 'With our shared commitment to improving fishing vessel safety, North, Sunderland Marine and Shipowners' have shared and reviewed their respective claims experience and identified a number of common causal factors. Our new loss prevention briefing provides recommendations to fishing vessel owners and operators on how to help avoid future incidents.'

Causal factors identified by the insurers include fishing crews being unaware of the hazards of fluorocarbon and ammonia gas refrigerants; poor condition of the refrigeration plant and its components; poor standards of operation and maintenance of the refrigeration plant; and the positioning of unprotected refrigeration plant and equipment on the back deck or in busy working areas, with insufficient warning signage and impact protection.

In addition North says there have been failures to identify high-risk tasks relating to the plant operation and maintenance; insufficient or inadequate levels of formal training in refrigeration engineering and plant-specific operation; and defective or missing gas-leak detection alarms.

'In the event of a leak, rescue operations were sometimes carried out without using breathing apparatus or without following a safe procedure,' says McBurnie. 'There was also evidence of poor emergency and evacuation procedures; a lack of crew familiarity in what to do in such an event; and improperly inspected and tested safety equipment.'

Recommendations in the loss prevention briefing include the importance of crew members knowing and understanding the hazards of refrigeration systems; the need for safe systems of operation; the importance of regular and properly recorded maintenance; the need for safe design and positioning of retrofitted systems; and the importance of effective response management.

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For further information contact: Alvin Forster or Craig McBurnie on +44 191 232 5221

Notes to Editors

1. North's and Shipowners' loss prevention briefing 'Refrigeration on Fishing Vessels', together with all North's other briefings, is freely available on North's website at <http://www.nepia.com/publications/loss-prevention-publications/loss-prevention-briefings>

or on Sunderland Marine's website at <http://www.sunderlandmarine.com/company/loss-prevention/loss-prevention-publications/>

2. The Shipowners' Club is a mutual marine liability insurer, providing P&I insurance for small and specialist vessels since 1855. The Club is a member of the International Group of P&I Clubs and works with more than 600 brokers globally to insure over 33,000 vessels across a range of operating sections and geographical areas. www.shipownersclub.com

3. The North of England P&I Association (North) is a leading global marine insurer providing P&I, FD&D, war risks and ancillary insurance to 130 million GT of owned tonnage on a mutual basis and 45 million GT of chartered tonnage. Through its guaranteed subsidiary Sunderland Marine, North is also a leading insurer of fishing vessels, small craft and aquaculture risks. The Club is based in Newcastle upon Tyne, UK with regional offices in Greece, Hong Kong, Japan and Singapore and Sunderland Marine offices worldwide. North is a leading member of the International Group of P&I Clubs (IG), with 11.6% of the IG's owned tonnage. The 13 IG clubs provide liability cover for approximately 90% of the world's ocean-going tonnage and, as a member of the IG, North protects and promotes the interests of the international shipping industry.