

Injury in heavy weather

It was morning and the vessel was sailing through heavy weather at beaufort 8 with large waves hitting the bow. The swell and waves were as high as 12 meters with average waves about 7 meters. Because of the bad weather the Master had ordered that no one went out onto the outside decks.

The normal routine was that the bosun came up on the bridge around 0700 to discuss the day's work with the chief officer. The chief officer didn't have any specific orders for the day except the normal jobs from the PMS (planned maintenance system). The bosun said he needed some paint from the paint locker by the bow so he could do some maintenance on the passageway. The chief officer told the bosun it was not a good idea to go forward with large waves hitting the bow and washing over the deck. The bosun said he would walk in the passageway and just sneak out quickly and reach the paint locker. The chief officer told him not to do it in the morning but in the afternoon when the heavy weather had calmed down and do some other jobs instead.

The bosun left the bridge and went down to the deck office and told one of the ABs that he would go forward to the paint locker to pick up some paint and that they would meet in the deck office afterwards.

The bosun proceeded forward in the passageway and opened the door by the bow to enter the deck and walk over to the paint locker. Just when the bosun entered the deck a big wave hit the vessel from the side and knocked the bosun into the bulkhead beside the door. The bosun lost consciousness and was knocked into the bulkhead a couple more times.



The AB had picked up some tools and was waiting in the deck office. After a while he started to wonder where the bosun was and called him on the UHF but there was no response. He called a couple more times but got no answer so he proceeded forward to the paint locker. He noticed that the door was not closed in the passageway and when he walked out on deck he could see the bosun's body lying by the railing risking being washed overboard as huge waves were hitting the vessel. The AB ran over and pulled the bosun into the passageway and sent an alarm to the bridge about the accident. The bosun had been wearing a hard hat but was bleeding from his head. A rescue team was assembled and took the bosun to the medical room.

Consequences

The bosun never regained consciousness and passed away a couple of hours later as the vessel was too far from shore for a medical evacuation, and the weather would have made that impossible anyway.

The vessel had a breakwater on the bow but it was not protecting the deck from major waves like this and sometimes waves were hitting the vessel from the side. ■

Discussion

Go to the "File" menu and select "Save as..." to save the pdf-file on your computer.

You can place the marker below each question to write the answer directly into the file.



1. What were the immediate causes of this accident?

2. Is there a risk that this kind of accident could happen on our vessel?

3. How could this accident have been prevented?

4. What sections of our SMS would have been breached if any?

5. Is our SMS sufficient to prevent this kind of accident?

6. Does our SMS address these risks when sailing in heavy weather?

7. What are our procedures for saving an injured crew member?

8. If procedures were breached, why do you think this was the case?

9. Do we have a risk assessment onboard that addresses these risks?

10. Could our risk assessment be improved?

11. What do you think was the root cause of this accident?

Issues to be considered after the discussion

- It is important to understand the risk and consequences of heavy weather. The master had issued an order not to go onto the open decks until the weather had calmed down, but this was ignored by the bosun who didn't appreciate the risks.
- In a situation like this it is also safer to wait for assistance instead of running out on deck and trying to save an injured crew member, because the risk of the sole rescuer being injured is very risky.