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DSC/Circ. 10 of 10 March 2003

INCIDENT REPORTS INVOLVING DANGEROUS CARGOES

Zinc Skimmings

(see Zinc Ashes UN 1435)

1 The Sub-Committee on Dangerous Goods, Solid Cargoes and Containers (DSC), at its seventh session (23 to 27 September 2002), considered a number of reports on casualties and incidents involving dangerous cargoes submitted by Member Governments and international organizations concerned.

2 The Sub-Committee's attention was particularly drawn to a report on the foundering of the cargo vessel 'Thor Emilie' (DSC 7/INF.4), loaded with Zinc Skimmings which were erroneously described as Oxide Zinc Ore. After the foundering, it became clear that the ship's cargo was not Oxide Zinc Ore but Zinc Skimmings, which is covered by the Code of Safe Practice for Solid Bulk Cargoes (BC Code) as a product able to evolve hydrogen and toxic gases when in contact with moisture or water, and for its carriage special permission and special equipment is required on board.

3 Although SOLAS VI-2 states that "the shipper shall provide the master or his representative with appropriate information on the cargo sufficiently in advance of loading to enable the precautions which may be necessary for proper stowage and safe carriage of the cargo to be put into effect", it was evident during the investigation that this provision was not taken into account during the carriage of the cargo.

4 The Sub-Committee noted the following conclusions drawn by the investigating team:

- .1 the foundering occurred extremely fast due to a heavy explosion/detonation in the cargo hold of the ship;
- .2 the master, with the knowledge about the characteristic of the cargo as understood by him, could not anticipate that during the voyage an explosive atmosphere could generate in the cargo hold;
- .3 the master, after the explosion, did not have any possibility of initiating effective measures for search and rescue of other crew members;
- .4 the brokering firm did not receive information about the correct description of the cargo and its UN number from the shipper neither before nor during the chartering negotiations with the owner's chartering manager;
- .5 the master, when he did not notice the description of the cargo as Zinc Skimmings on the statement before and on the final cargo documents, which he signed before departure, prevented himself from discontinuing the loading and have the ship discharged;
- .6 the ship with respect to her equipment and crew and the stowing of the cargo was fully seaworthy if the cargo had been harmless; however, for such a dangerous cargo, the ship did not meet the requirements for carriage, neither in construction nor in equipment;
- .7 the negotiations between the broker and the owner's chartering manager could have discontinued if the owner's chartering manager had insisted upon receipt of proper documentation to the effect that the cargo was non-dangerous;
- .8 the owner's chartering manager, when he did not notice the description of the cargo as Zinc Skimmings in the final cargo documents, which he received about two hours after the departure of the ship, did not advise the master from breaking off the actual voyage; and
- .9 for safe carriage of dangerous goods it is a precondition that these goods are documented and properly described by using the proper shipping name and the associated UN number. A high degree of trust is placed on the shipper in meeting this requirement.

5 The investigation recommends that the owner establish a procedure in the ISM system to the effect, that it is made certain, when entering into a charter party, that the owner's charterers receive proper documentation of the cargo, for which the charterers bid, including an exact notification of whether the cargo is listed under an UN number, and if so which UN number. The investigation further recommends to the owner that the charterers go through a certified dangerous goods course.

6 Member Governments are invited to bring the above information to the attention of shipowners, ship operators, companies, shipmasters, shippers and all other parties concerned requesting that appropriate action be taken in accordance with the provisions of the relevant IMO instruments.