

Disposal of flammable substances with ignition sources

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A member has reported an environmental incident in which flammable substances were disposed of from a vessel in the same bags as potential ignition sources.

Following a port call by the vessel, a large amount of waste was offloaded alongside. The waste disposal contractor were advised by the vessel crew that they were offloading a number of hazardous substances including, aerosols, hydrocarbons, oily rags, oil filters and paint thinners. The waste disposal contractor was informed that the vessel crew would separate the special waste, in particular separate the flammable paint thinners into a metal drum to avoid contact with the other materials which provided a potential ignition source.

However, once the waste was lifted off the vessel and transported back to the yard of the waste disposal contractor, it was clear that vessel crew had in fact placed all the waste into black bags and had not segregated the special waste. As the bags were not transparent, a chemist was obliged to open it (which they should not have had to do) in order to identify and separate the flammable paint thinners from the other ignition sources.

Findings

Our Member's investigation noted the following:

- The vessel crew had not followed their Garbage Management Plan and as a result placed a number of their colleagues and also waste disposal contractor personnel at significant risk of exposure to a fire by placing flammable paint thinners in the same bag as ignition sources such as oily rags and other hydrocarbons.
- There was poor communication about the on-board waste procedure between the various departments.
- The vessel also incurred an extra cost as a result of the disposal company having to segregate the hazardous waste.

Action

Our Member took action to ensure that:

- All personnel are aware of the dangers of storing/disposing of flammable substances with ignition sources.

- Clear plastic bags are used on board for all waste bins.
- Bags containing hazardous substances for disposal are clearly labelled to indicate contents.
- Flammable substances are not being stored/disposed with ignition sources; crew should be vigilant of this fact, especially when disposing and storing hazardous substances.
- Vessel management delivered a presentation to the crew on ensuring proper waste segregation on-board.

Members may wish to refer to the following similar incident (key words: disposal, waste):

- Disposal of pyrotechnics

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