NTSB: Engine room fire – put things back properly after maintenance

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The National Transportation Safety Board of the United States (NTSB) has published report MIR 25-29 relating to an engine room fire on board a dredging vessel.

What happened?

A fire broke out in the engine room. Two crew members were in the machinery control room when the fire started: one escaped, and the other was removed by the shipboard emergency squad and later pronounced dead at a local hospital. After reporting no active fire and removing the crew member, the crew verified that the engine room was sealed and released the fixed gas fire extinguishing system. No pollution was reported. Damage to the vessel was estimated at US$18 million.

What was the cause?

NTSB determined that the probable cause of the engine room fire was lube oil spraying from an auxiliary diesel engine (generator) and igniting off a nearby running diesel engine.
This came about because:

- A vital plug was not reinstalled after routine maintenance in accordance with the engine manufacturer's instructions.
- There was no thorough inspection of the engine before initially starting it after maintenance.

What do we learn?

After maintenance:

- Be careful of automatic control of equipment – as far as is appropriate and practical, make a local test start of machinery after any changes or any

maintenance.
- Ensure there is diligent inspection of machinery to ensure it functions as expected.
- Ensure that all components have been reinstalled properly.

Starting up engines locally, rather than remotely, gives crew members the opportunity to immediately verify that the engine is operating satisfactorily (to the manufacturer’s specifications) with no visible fuel, lube oil, or water leaks, and has no atypical noises or vibrations that require it to be stopped.

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