UK MAIB: Deep fat fryer fire

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The UK Marine Accident Investigation Branch published Safety Digest 2/2023, consisting of lessons from recent Marine Accident Reports. IMCA has reviewed the report and passes on to members some of the incidents in the MAIB report. This is one of them.

What happened?

Catering crew had a lucky escape after switching on the galley equipment electrical isolators to start preparing for lunch. The supply breaker to the deep fat fryers tripped while the equipment was heating up and the engineers were called to reset it.

Two of the deep fat fryers had no oil in them and their heating elements quickly overheated when the power supply was restored after the breaker was reset. The ship's alarm and monitoring system detected the excessive temperatures and the thermal protection tripped the deep fat fryers' power supply, but not before a fire had started.

The crew raised the alarm and used a fire blanket to quickly smother the flames. The ship's emergency team mustered, isolated the galley's power and ventilation supplies and confirmed the fire was successfully extinguished. There was no damage and no injuries.

What went wrong?

The two deep fat fryers had been drained of oil for cleaning and the cause of the fire was found to be residual food scraps saturated with fat that had ignited when the fryers were switched on.

Lessons learned

- Ensure lock-out/tag-out (LOTO) procedures are fit for purpose and followed fully during maintenance and cleaning tasks.
  - Displaying a simple do not use notice on out of service equipment can improve safety and prevent careless mistakes
- Ensure equipment is ready to go back into service when work has been completed.

- Check circuit breakers, trip switches and fuses, which prevent electrical systems becoming overloaded or causing harm. Always check equipment before resetting its electrical supply to ensure all is well.
- Drills: robust safety procedures and well-practised drills prepare crew to deal with the unexpected. In this case the rapid organised response to a small fire prevented injury to crew and serious damage to the ship.

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