

Near miss: Emergency fire pump could not be started from the bridge

Safety Flash Published on 21 March 2017 Generated on 17 February 2026 IMCA SF 06/17

A member has reported a near miss incident in which it was discovered that an emergency fire pump could not be started from the bridge.

What happened?

The discovery was made during a fire drill exercise on a vessel.

The Master immediately informed the chief engineer.

The chief engineer took action and noticed that the emergency fire pump main switch in the engine room was switched to local control. He switched it from local control to bridge remote and informed the bridge to start again; on this attempt it was started successfully and came on line.

IOGP Life Saving Rules:



Bypassing safety controls





**Always use the Stop
Work Policy to prevent
unsafe acts or
conditions**

What went wrong?

Our member's investigation noted that:

- The vessel's Emergency Fire pump main control switch in the engine control room was switched to "local control" instead of "remote/bridge control". This meant that the Emergency Fire pump could not have been started from the bridge.
- **Stop work authority** (safety observation) was not properly used. The chief engineer confirmed that when he had joined the vessel he had found the main switch on local control but did nothing to correct it.
- Existing company **procedures were not followed** by the Master or the chief engineer, for monthly and weekly checks of this equipment. "*Run the emergency fire pump on weekly basis and ensure that it is capable of supplying water under pressure to two charged fire hoses*". This item was

marked as completed.

- There was a **failure of communication**: The fire drill scenario was particularly highlighted to the chief engineer, including the fact that during fire drill it would be required to start the Emergency Fire pump from the bridge. It was obviously understood but order and procedures were not followed.

Actions

- The chief engineer should ensure that the main switch in the engine room is always stationed on “Bridge Remote Control”.
- A sign or notice to this effect should be posted in the engine room to remind engineers to always leave the switch on bridge remote control.

Lessons learned

- Ask questions, be willing to exercise the stop work authority; don't assume it's all just business as usual.
- Drills and exercises exist for a reason – treat them seriously and guard against complacency.
- Ensure that critical equipment checklists and tests are thoroughly carried out for real, not just ticked off.
- Handovers at crew change and shift should be comprehensive and thorough, with a written record, and should cover all vital areas of concern.

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