

Confined space entry – multiple fatalities

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The UK Marine Accident Investigation Branch (MAIB) has published the following report regarding an incident in which three persons were killed as a result of confined space entry on a cargo vessel in dock.

What happened?

Three crew members on board the cargo vessel were found unconscious in the main cargo hold forward access compartment, which was sited in the vessel's forecastle (f'ocsle). The crew members were recovered from the compartment but, despite intensive resuscitation efforts by their rescuers, they did not survive. The vessel was carrying a cargo of sawn timber and, at the time of the incident, shore stevedores were discharging the timber loaded on top of the forward hatch cover. Two of the ship's crew were standing by to clear away the deck cargo's protective tarpaulins as the timber discharge progressed aft. During this time, the two crewmen entered the forward main hold access compartment. The chief officer, who was looking for the two crewmen, found the compartment hatch cover open and shouted down to them before climbing into the space. A third crewman saw the chief officer enter the compartment. When he looked down the hatch, he saw the chief officer collapse.

The alarm was raised and an initially frantic rescue operation was undertaken by the vessel's two remaining crew, and two stevedores. One of the two crewmen started the hold ventilation fan, and brought a breathing apparatus (BA) set and an emergency escape breathing device (EEBD) to the f'ocsle. He donned the BA set, which did not have a face mask fitted, and entered the compartment. Despite having the breathing regulator in his mouth, it was not supplying him with sufficient air. Two stevedores also entered the compartment during the rescue: one using the EEBD and another without any breathing apparatus whatsoever. While there, they were able to pass lifting slings around the fallen crew so they could be recovered to the deck. The crewman and stevedores suffered severe breathing problems when they returned to deck.

Ambulance paramedics, fire and rescue services and the police subsequently attended. Despite the best efforts of all involved, none of the three crewmen who were recovered from the compartment survived.

The full report can be downloaded from maib.gov.uk/cms_resources.cfm?file=/Safety%20Bulletin3_2014.pdf

All information is anonymised or sanitised, as appropriate, and warnings for graphic content included where possible.

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