MSF: Potential dropped objects – nets or tarps to cover cargo?

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IOGP Life Saving Rules:

- Bypassing safety controls
- Line of fire

What happened?

Marine Safety Forum Safety Alert 20-04 describes a potential dropped object (PDO) during cargo operations. A wooden baton of the type often used to support covers attached to open topped Cargo Carrying Units (CCUs), was discovered jammed against the underside of a cargo basket.

Finding this PDO prompted the operator to carry out an assessment of the suitability and need for wooden batons on open top CCUs. Some of the assessment findings are noted here.

What were the causes? What went wrong?

- Wooden batons are normally used to support the tarpaulin cover used on open top CCUs.
- Wooden batons are only held in place by being jammed against the sides of the open top.
- There is generally no securing mechanism holding the wooden batons in place.
- Batons need to be 'knocked out' before heavy cargo is lifted from the CCU by crane.
- Knocking out batons from high sided CCUs can result in the baton falling onto the persons removing it.

These findings prompted another assessment comparing the use of tarpaulins versus the use of nets as top covers for CCUs, below are some of the assessment findings:

Net Covers	Tarpaulin Covers
No significant weight	Much heavier than nets to manhandle
Multiple tie down points	Limited tie down points (eyelets)
Less prone to ripping and tearing	Unusable if ripped or torn
Easily and cheaply repaired if ripped or torn	Disposed of when ripped or torn
Doesn't hold water	Holds water (extra weight when lifting)
Doesn't require wooden batons for support	Requires wooden batons for support (PDO)
Doesn't catch in the wind	Catches in the wind, potential to tear off
No protection from the environment	Provides protection from the environment

The MSF safety alert concluded:

"Tarpaulins and batons do have their uses when required for covering cargo, but their use should always be risk assessed and evaluated against other cover types which may be readily available.

"The risk assessment should include but not be limited to:

- *the type of cargo and the effects of its exposure to the environment*
- *the manual handling issues that may be encountered by the end user*
- *consider the use of 'cord strap' or similar instead of wooden batons to support covers. (particularly on high sided open top units)."*

See the full Marine Safety Forum Safety Alert 20-04.

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