CASE STUDY

Falling steel plates caused leg injury

Category: Personal injury
Vessel type: All
Issue date: 27/02/2012
Case number: 201211

The incident
In heavy weather, in the course of routine rounds in his watch, the 4th engineer noticed that steel plates stowed in a storage rack against a bulkhead were inadequately secured and were beginning to move. Without considering the hazards or informing the senior watchkeeping engineer (2nd engineer), he decided to re-stow the plates and re-secure the rack unassisted. During this process, the vessel suddenly rolled heavily. The plates toppled, trapping and crushing the 4th engineer's left leg. The 2nd engineer, who was in the workshop at the time, heard the noise of the falling plates and a cry from the trapped 4th engineer. He immediately rushed to the location and sounded the emergency alarm. The Emergency Team assembled and rescued the 4th engineer, who was immediately given first aid. Due to the serious injury, and under radio medical advice, the vessel deviated to the nearest port, from where the injured crew member was flown to Singapore in an air ambulance, for further medical treatment to his broken leg.

Observations
Root cause/contributory factors:
- Failure to inform other personnel of a hazardous situation and failure to seek assistance.
- Lack of experience and awareness – the young 4th engineer did not understand the risks in attempting to re-stow and re-secure the steel plates unassisted.
- Inadequate securing system using only a single retaining bar and hook arrangement.
- Hazardous environmental condition (heavy weather).

Corrective/preventative actions
Fleet circular issued to all vessels instructing crew members to:
- Conduct a proper risk assessment before engaging in any task.
- Always inform head of department of any hazardous condition and never to attempt an unauthorised job, task or hazardous task alone.
- Senior officers and ratings to share with others their personal experiences in order to enhance safety awareness on board.