



Bundesstelle für Seeunfalluntersuchung Federal Bureau of Maritime Casualty Investigation

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Press Release 15/15

The Federal Bureau of Maritime Casualty Investigation (BSU) hereby gives notice that the investigation report No 99/13 was published on 9 October 2015. The investigation was jointly conducted by the BSU, as Lead Investigation State, and the investigation authority of the Flag State Sweden. The investigation report deals with the fire on board the ConRo-freighter ATLANTIC CARTIER in the port of Hamburg on 1 May 2013.

Upon request the report will be forwarded. Alternatively this report – as well as all previous reports – is available on the website <http://www.bsu-bund.de> and can be downloaded.

Serious marine casualty – fire on board the ATLANTIC CARTIER

On 1 May 2013, a fire broke out on an enclosed vehicle deck on board the Swedish flagged ConRo-cargo vessel ATLANTIC CARTIER. Thereby the brand-new motor vehicles stowed there were destroyed. Nobody was injured. After an unsuccessful attempt to extinguish the fire from onboard the vessel, the

vessels command requested assistance from the fire service in Hamburg. The fire service succeeded in preventing the fire from spreading to further parts of the vessel and the cargo by deploying extensive forces. The fire could be extinguished after a 9-hour operation.

The investigation report was published by the Federal Bureau of Maritime Casualty Investigation on 9 October 2015 and is available on www.bsu-bund.de.

Long version

Serious marine casualty – Fire on board the Con-Ro-vessel ATLANTIC CARTIER during the night from 1 May to 2 May in the port of Hamburg

Heat and smoke emanating from an enclosed vehicle deck on board the Swedish flagged ConRo-cargo vessel ATLANTIC CARTIER, laden with containers and motor vehicles, was detected at about 1925 on 1 May 2013. At this time, the vessel was at her berth in the port of Hamburg. Cargo handling did not take place.

After locating the fire inside an enclosed vehicle deck, it was attempted to extinguish the fire from on board the vessel. The action taken in this respect had to be suspended shortly afterwards since it failed and due to the rapid spread of the fire and huge build-up of smoke. The master of the vessel immediately requested shore-based assistance. The first operational units of the Hamburg fire service reached the vessel at about 2012 and after having received a briefing on board by the vessels command assumed control of the further firefighting. In the course of the ensuing eight hours additional extensive firefighting units were deployed on board and on shore for cooling the vessels shell plating and to extinguish the fire later on. At the same time as the actual priority were the intensive cooling efforts, carried out especially from on board, the time-consuming situation assessment by the fire service and the manifold preparations for the firefighting, preparations were made for the discharge of the containers in the immediate vicinity of the seat of fire, priority given those with dangerous cargo, and ultimately carried out.

Parallel to the conventional firefighting activities, the vessels command and the operational command of the fire service agreed upon the operation of the shipboard CO₂-extinguishing system. At 2258 and at 2318 CO₂ from both tanks of the system was discharged in the burning vehicle deck. The combination of the CO₂ operation and the external cooling efforts had the desired effect, meaning that the conventional extinguishing action could be started at 0344. At 0410 the fire was successfully extinguished.

Neither crewmembers nor operational units of the fire services were injured. The vehicles stowed in the most affected areas in the forward Ro-Ro decks 3 B were destroyed. The damage to the Ro-Ro cargo in the other places was depending on the distance to the seat of fire. The ATLANTIC CARTIER was able to resume her voyage for the charterer after an extensive repair.

Within the scope of the investigation, the BSU commissioned an independent expert to clarify the cause of the fire. Moreover, the BSU dealt intensively with the conflicting thesis written by the experts commissioned by the vessels owner and a cargo insurer with respect to the origin of the fire. After having analyzed this and all other sources of information, the BSU is not in a position to make any statement with respect to the cause of the fire on board the ATLANTIC CARTIER with absolute certainty. However, technical factors on board and factors relating to the motor vehicles transported, which, irrespective of the question concerning the actual cause of the accident, which cannot be clarified by the BSU, but may generally enhance the risk of a cargo hold fire.

In addition to the identified risk factors and the safety recommendations derived therefrom, the investigation report broaches the issues of the firefighting. The topic “dangerous cargo” is only dealt with marginally since it was not crucial for the accident.

Volker Schellhammer
Director