



# Bundesstelle für Seeunfalluntersuchung Federal Bureau of Maritime Casualty Investigation

Federal Higher Authority subordinated to the Ministry of  
Transport and Digital Infrastructure

Federal Bureau of Maritime Casualty Investigation • P.O. Box 30 12 20 • 20305 Hamburg

#### Office Building

Bernhard-Nocht-Str. 78  
20359 Hamburg  
Tel.: + 49 (0) 40 31 90 – 83 11  
Fax: + 49 (0) 40 31 90 – 83 40  
posteingang-bsu@bsh.de  
<http://www.bsu-bund.de>

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**+ 49 40 31 90 – 83 21**

**email: [posteingang-bsu@bsh.de](mailto:posteingang-bsu@bsh.de)**

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## PRESS RELEASE No 03/20

The Federal Bureau of Maritime Casualty Investigation (BSU) published the investigation report No 15/19 on 30 January 2020. The report deals with the fire in the area of the deck cargo on board the container ship YANTIAN EXPRESS on the Atlantic Ocean.

This report is available on

<https://www.bsu-bund.de/EN/>

for download.

### **Fire in the area of the deck cargo on board the container ship YANTIAN EXPRESS on the Atlantic Ocean**

In the early morning of 3 January 2019, a fire broke out in the deck cargo in the area of cargo hold 2 on board the German flagged container ship YANTIAN EXPRESS. At that time, the ship was on the North Atlantic. It was due to reach Halifax on the following day.

The ships command immediately ordered the crew to fight the fire. However, despite great dedication, the crew did not succeed in containing the fire with shipboard resources and keeping it under control, respectively. The spread of the fire to the superstructures could be prevented.

The shipping company concluded a contract with a salvage company very quickly. In the late evening on 4 January 2019, their tug, the SMIT NICOBAR, already reached the operation site and took over the firefighting operations with the help of their extinguishing monitors.

Despite the action taken by the SMIT NICOBAR, the fire spread further in the deck area of cargo hold 1. Due to the overall situation, at first a part of the YANTIAN EXPRESS's crew and later on the whole crew, left the ship and transferred to the tug.

On 7 January 2019, the MAERSK MOBILISER reached the operation site and took over the firefighting operations. Since the situation on board the burning ship seemed safer than beforehand on 9 January 2019, five crewmembers returned to the YANTIAN EXPRESS voluntarily and resumed the operation of the ship. With the crew, the salvage master started his work on the damaged ship as well.

In the ensuing days, further tugs and supply ships reached the YANTIAN EXPRESS and took salvage experts and firefighters with their equipment to the scene. The remaining crewmembers of the YANTIAN EYPRESS were taken to the next port by another ship of the shipping company.

19 days after the fire broke out, the salvage company declared the containers stowed on deck of the YANTIAN EXPRESS extinguished. On 22 January 2019, towing of the ship towards the Bahamas could be commenced. Later on, the YANTIAN EXPRESS continued her voyage under her own power. In doing so, the tugs accompanied her. On 26 January 2019, the last burning containers in cargo hold 1 were extinguished and all fire extinguishing pumps were stopped.

On 30 January 2019, tug and tow reached the anchorage of the port of refuge in Freeport, Bahamas. Several days later, the ship was allowed to sail into the port. On 19 February 2019, unloading the containers in the area of cargo holds 1 and 2 started.

On 25 January 2019, the shipping company declared the general average in connection with the fire on board the YANTIAN EXPRESS.

The Federal Bureau of Maritime Casualty Investigation started its investigation on board after the ship had arrived on the anchorage of Freeport. In doing so, areas on the ship crucial for the development of the fire and the firefighting operations were inspected. The area where the fire broke out was inspected thoroughly in the port. Unloading of the containers of this area was observed. However, the BSU investigation could not clarify the cause of the fire unambiguously. This was especially due to the very long duration of the fire and the intensive use of firefighting water which changed the origin of the fire strongly. By procedure of exclusion, three containers which could possibly have caused the fire, were identified. One of the containers was laden with Coconut Charcoal, which was erroneously declared Coconut Pellets. As regards this plant coal, analogies are shown to the marine casualty investigation BSU 455/15 – fire on the MSC KATRINA by self-igniting of the charcoal stowed in one container.

All investigation reports, safety recommendations and other information published by the BSU are available on

<https://www.bsu-bund.de/EN/Publications>.

Ulf Kaspera  
Director