



Bundesstelle für Seeunfalluntersuchung Federal Bureau of Maritime Casualty Investigation

Federal Higher Authority subordinated to
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The Federal Bureau of Maritime Casualty Investigation (BSU) hereby announces the publication of the Summary Investigation Report 415/19 on 23 March 2021. The report deals with the line accident of the chemical tanker THEMSESTERN in the southern chamber of the NOK's new lock in Kiel Holtenau on 30 November 2019. The report is available for download at

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

Less serious marine casualty – line accident in the NOK-lock Kiel-Holtenau

At about 0936 on 30 November 2019, the head line of the THEMSESTERN, a chemical tanker registered in Madeira/Portugal, failed in the southern chamber of the NOK's new lock in Kiel-Holtenau.

On board the ship, final preparations were made to leave the lock chamber for the NOK, when the line failed. The end of the head line that was ashore and still attached to the bollard, was under tension, shot back and struck several window panes of a service building on the locks middle wall with great force and shattered some of them. A linesman who stood in the doorway, was struck on the leg by the line and slightly injured. Two further linesmen who were in a rest area in the building, were struck by shattered glass of the destroyed window panes. Fortunately, they only sustained minor injuries. Nobody came to harm on board the THEMSESTERN and not material damage occurred.

The cause of the failure of the head line could not be clarified. It is conceivable that the relevant head line had already been damaged before (not visible on the surface). It is also conceivable that an error was made when operating the relevant winch in the course of the preparations made for the casting off manoeuvre, e.g. accidentally heaving the line instead of lowering. A strong gust of wind and/or the wake of a tug, having passed the tanker shortly before the incident occurred, in order to leave the lock chamber, cannot be ruled out completely as cumulative accident factors. However, the BSU considers it to be unlikely that this was the primary cause of the accident.

Accordingly, the BSU investigation focussed on the occupational safety measures taken by the Federal Waterways and Shipping Administration responsible for the safe operation of the NOK-locks. In this connection, it became clear that the risks posed by failing lines in the locks of Kiel-Holtenau and Brunsbüttel have already been in the focus of attention by a wide range of regulatory and technical activities. As a consequence of the accident, a remaining safety gap in the safety conception was closed in the course of the accident by installing shatterproof glass in the building on the lock's middle wall of the new lock in Kiel-Holtenau (following the example of Brunsbüttel).

The BSU does consider it appropriate to publish a Summary Investigation Report about the line failure of the THEMSESTERN despite the mildly consequences of the accident. The report should serve the purpose of drawing attention to the risks associated with mooring lines inherent in the system once again. Indeed, it concerns a risk factor a least known maritime shipping and with the personnel in ports and locks. However, the fact that line failures – for whatever reasons – can suddenly occur at any time and entail serious consequences for life and limb, demands to sensitize for this accident risk once more.

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

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

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Director