

## **Marine casualty**

### **Serious marine casualty: Grounding after emergency towing attempts failed**

#### **What happened?**

Despite two anchors dropped, a bulk carrier (GT 40,000), sailing in ballast, was drifting towards the coast in hurricane winds since the early morning. The ship's engine power did not suffice to prevent her from drifting. Since a commercial assistant tug was not available at short notice, the VTS ordered a tug acting on behalf of the government, to proceed to the distressed vessel. The tug's task was to keep the bulk carrier on her position after having established a towing connection and prevent her from drifting further. In the afternoon, it was possible to establish a towing connection between the tug and the distressed vessel after several attempts had failed before. However, this towing connection broke after approx. 45 minutes. The bulk carrier continued to drift towards the coast. Further attempts to establish a towing connection could not be made since the water depth available, continuously decreased and did not allow for the tug to manoeuvre safely. The distressed vessel grounded in the late afternoon. Three days later, the ship could be towed off the shallow. No environmental pollution occurred.

#### **Why did it happen?**

- The ship's engine power did not suffice to stop the drift motion caused by the hurricane winds with her own power.
- The distressed ship's master apprehended that the tug acting on behalf of the government might actually be a commercial salvage tug. The attempts made by the VTS and the tug to clarify the situation, were only comprehended little by little due to language barriers on board the distressed vessel. Therefore, valuable time was wasted.
- In order to establish a towing connection, the distressed ship's deck crew had to receive a sequence of several lines connected next to each other with increasing diameter. The strong hurricane winds, the psychological and physical strain resulting from this and the deck crew's inexperience in line handling during an extreme situation led to multiple failure of the line transfer.
- The breaking of the successfully established towing connection was caused by an inappropriate fastening point with regard to its position on deck and load-bearing capacity on board the distressed vessel by the ship's command.

#### **What can we learn?**

- When a severe gale approaches, the ship should leave her anchorage in good time and attempt to reach a sea area where the storm can be weathered safely.
- Ship's commands must be adequately trained in communicating with other ships in extreme situations, particularly with tugs and Vessel Traffic Services.

- Ship's commands and crews must be adequately familiar with the ship's related Know-how to be complied with in establishing an emergency towing connection (on the basis of practicable, comprehensible structured and clearly arranged emergency towing booklets) and frequently trained and instructed in this respect.

**Who may benefit?**

Ship's commands, seafarers, vessels owners