MARINE CASUALTY

Less serious marine casualty: Failing of a head line with the injury of linesmen in a building in the vicinity of the quay wall

What happened?

While casting off from the berth in a Kiel Holtenau lock chamber, one of the ship's head lines failed. The end of the line that was still "on shore" on the bollard and under tension, shot back, and struck several windows of a service building on the quay wall with great force and scattered some of them. A linesman standing in the doorway of the building in that moment, was struck on the leg by the line and slightly injured. Two further linesmen in a rest area in the building were hit by shattered windowpanes, but fortunately only sustained minor injuries. Nobody was injured on the ship.

Why did it happen?

- The cause of the line failure could not be determined. It is conceivable that the line in question (externally not visible) had already suffered damages before. It is conceivable as well that errors were made while handling the relevant winch on the fore manoeuvring station in the process of preparing the casting off manoeuvre, i.e. accidentially heaving and not lowering the line. A strong gust of wind and/or another ships wake cannot be ruled out completely as accumulative factors for the accident

- The service building with the rest area for the linesmen was not equipped with shatter resistent windows.

What can we learn?

Due to the rather limited possibilities on shore to influence ship based factors with respect to the safe handling of lines, especially because of the fact that line failures are never completely avoidable, the organisational and technical measures on shore, aimed at protecting the persons there from the consequences of line failures are of particular importance.

Concerning this, the lock operator has been taking extensive precautionary measures for several years. There are already shelters made from steel providing waiting areas and refuge for the linesmen. Moreover, particularly dangerous areas are pointed out by means of warning notices and markings on the bottom.

However, the accident showed that even people staying in solid buildings can be exposed to the danger of failing lines. This always applies to buildings located in the danger zone of failing lines and when the structural conditions, particularly the glass of windows and doors, do not provide sufficient protection. Therefore, it is crucial to equip buildings located in ports or locks in the alleged area of failing lines, with shatter proof windows or grids.

Irrespective of the accident, the finding that failing lines canendanger people on shore even when they are in a closed room, can be applied to cars and commercial vehicles often parked in the vicinity of the ships berth. Their glass is certainly not designed to protect the driver and passengers from the impact of a failing line. Therefore, parking of vehicles in the alleged area of failing lines, must be limited to the necessary extent, particularly as far as and as long as people are in this area.

Who may benefit?

Lock and port facility operators, owners of buildings located there; drivers and passengers of cars and commercial vehicles, which should be parked in the area of mooring lines