

Collision while being overtaken

It was after midnight and the 2nd Officer was on watch. The weather was pleasant and the general cargo vessel was sailing in a busy area. The S-band radar was operational in off centre 12M, north up, relative motion mode, while the x-band radar was on standby. In the cockpit there was also an ECDIS, which the OOW was monitoring.



There were a couple of vessels behind the cargo vessel. About five minutes before midnight the 2nd Officer came up onto the bridge for his watch. During the handover, the Master informed the 2nd Officer about the vessels astern, and that they were being overtaken by a couple of them. The cargo vessel was maintaining a speed of 10 knots.

The 2nd Officer was aware of a vessel overtaking from the portside, but was not aware of vessel B overtaking from the starboard side.

He switched the radar from centre display to off-centre several times during his watch.

While the 2nd Officer was in the cockpit he could see a target on the radar which was astern on the starboard side and was getting very close, only a couple of cables away. He turned around and could see that vessel B was actually extremely close.

He tried to call the Master but couldn't reach him. He switched to manual steering and went hard to starboard but it was too late and vessel B collided with the cargo vessel.

Shortly afterwards the Master came onto the bridge. He noticed that the vessel was still steering full ahead and hard to starboard but wasn't moving in that direction, so he reduced the engines to 60%. The cargo vessel was not moving and vessel B had hit it on the starboard side by cargo hold 2.

After a while vessel B moved astern and the vessels came loose. The Master tried to contact vessel B but they responded that they had only been involved in a near miss. After a while they admitted that they had been involved in a collision.

The master saved the VDR but unfortunately it was connected to the x-band radar that was in standby mode.



Discussion

Go to the "File" menu and select "Save as..." to save the pdf-file on your computer.

You can place the marker below each question to write the answer directly into the file.



1. What were the immediate causes of this accident?

2. Is there a risk that this kind of accident could happen on our vessel?

3. How could this accident have been prevented?

4. What sections of our SMS would have been breached if any?

5. Is our SMS sufficient to prevent this kind of accident?

6. Does our SMS address these risks?

8. How do we ensure that we are aware of the traffic in the area and aren't surprised by a vessel overtaking us?

7. How long before the watch are you supposed to be on the bridge for the handover?

9. Do we use all navigational equipment on the bridge while sailing?

10. Why do you think that vessel B did nothing to prevent the collision?

11. Could this happen on our vessel?

12. What do you think was the root cause of this accident?

Issues to be considered after the discussion

Even if vessel B was mostly to blame for this collision it could have been handled better by the OOW on the cargo vessel.

COLREGS

Rule 5

Determines that every vessel shall at all times maintain a proper look-out by sight and hearing, as well as by all available means appropriate to the prevailing circumstances and conditions, so as to make a full appraisal of the situation and of the risk of collision.

This would include having both radars on. If the radars are working properly they should always be used for plotting traffic. The x-band radar was also the radar that recorded the VDR. Why the lookout didn't inform anyone about the vessel overtaking is unclear. It is essential that the OOW ensures that the lookout reports all traffic around the vessel.

Rule 13

Determines that any vessel overtaking another shall keep out of the way of the vessel being overtaken, and a vessel shall be deemed to be overtaking when coming up on another vessel from a direction more than 22.5 degrees abaft of the beam. This means that the vessel being overtaken has right of way.

It is essential to ensure the OOW knows about all traffic, which would include any vessels that are overtaking.

Rule 17

This also means that a vessel has the obligation to hold its course and speed (rule 17 (a)(i)). However, as soon as it becomes apparent to the vessel that has to maintain its course and speed that the other vessel required to keep out of the way is not taking appropriate action, it should take action to avoid a collision (rule 17 (a)(ii)).

The OOW saw vessel B too late to be able to take any evasive action. ■