



FINDINGS OF CONCERN

Sector Honolulu

April 7, 2021
Honolulu, HI

Findings of Concern 005-21

SEA PORT EMERGENCY RESPONSE AT PORT OF PAGO PAGO, AMERICAN SAMOA

Purpose. The U.S. Coast Guard issues findings of concern to disseminate information related to unsafe conditions that were identified as causal factors in a casualty and could contribute to future incidents. Findings of concern are intended to educate the public, state, or local agencies about the conditions discovered so they may address the findings with an appropriate voluntary action or highlight existing applicable company policies or state/local regulations.

The Incident. On December 5, 2018, a commercial fishing vessel was conducting shore side maintenance at the American Samoa Main Container Dock, which included hot work (welding). A fire ignited in the space directly above where the hot work was being conducted. The crew's initial firefighting efforts immediately extinguished the fire. However, the fire re-flashed and rapidly spread to the superstructure of the vessel exceeding the onboard maritime firefighting capabilities. Shore side fire response was requested and, after arriving on scene, they found they were under equipped and not sufficiently trained in maritime firefighting techniques. Ultimately, responders were unable to get the fire under control and the vessel was towed out to sea where it eventually sank.

Contributing Factors and Analysis. The Coast Guard investigation identified insufficient crew procedures and training, noting the failure to set a re-flash watch as the main contributing factor to the fire on board the vessel. Additionally, the investigation identified areas of concern with the response and familiarity of conducting firefighting efforts in a maritime environment. Although the shore side firefighters valiantly fought to extinguish the blaze, fighting fires on a vessel introduces unique challenges, such as managing vessel stability. In addition, the widely accepted strategy to attack marine fires by starving the blaze is in contrast to fighting building fires, which typically involve ventilating the structure to release heat and smoke.

Finding of Concern. Coast Guard investigators have identified the following measures that can be implemented by similar ports and local authorities to mitigate the risks associated with the identified contributing factors:

- Conduct annual exercises with port industry stakeholders and local authorities to demonstrate effective responses (e.g., maritime firefighting, emergency medevacs) and develop a readiness posture for maritime emergencies and natural disasters.

Closing. These findings of concern are provided for informational purpose only and do not relieve any domestic or international safety, operational, or material requirements. For any questions or comments please contact Sector Honolulu Investigations Division by phone at (808) 522-8251 or by email at D14-DG-SH-SecHono-Prevention-Investigation@uscg.mil.