



Seatrade

REVIEW

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- Dynamic duo – Tschudi and Eitzen
- Mike Hudner – ten years on
- A user-friendly derivative
- Classroom calamities – managing marine emergencies

PLUS

- Panama
- Ship Management & Crewing

Growing on trees
Easy money for shipping

BRIEFING

Walking through the fire

What happens when a container ship and a tanker collide off Montauk Point, New York? Somewhere aboard the 6,000 teu 'Griffin', several containers filled with hazardous chemicals are stowed. 'The real dangerous stuff is carried below to avoid washing overboard,' informs Roger Elliot, president, Smit Americas. It could take days even weeks to locate the toxins due to mislabeling of containers.

He continues, 'The ship is banjoed in the engine room, the engine room is gone, there is no power, the last hold is gone. The deck cargoes are going, the holds are flooded, the crew has abandoned ship. What do you do?' Elliot's voice booms the question to a roomful of senior operations officers from industry, the US Coast Guard and the Navy Supervisor of Salvage during a four day session called 'Managing Marine Emergencies.'

As the burning containership drifts, an explosion is heard aboard the 'Sea Lion', a single hull, very large crude carrier. The 'Sea Lion's' forward portside tank is gone, the vessel is on fire, the manifolds are gone. Major pollution is evident. The deck is on fire, the accommodation spaces are gutted, the crew has abandoned ship, caught fire and perished. 'Why didn't they make it?' Elliot demands.

The 'Griffin' has drifted onto the rocks and reeks of cyanide fumes. All hell is erupting and the powerless, crewless 'Sea Lion' is about to ground. 'How do you deal with it? Is this plausible? Why not?' asks Elliot, 'Something close to it happened in the Strait of Malacca. Are you geared to take it?' he wants to know.

Smit served up several real and imagined scenarios in the Houston classroom involving vessel collision, grounding, fire, capsizing and sinking following six similar seminars in Rotterdam. Smit called on a host of industry experts in major shipping and offshore casualties to participate in the seminar.

Salvage company Smit has designed an intensive course on managing marine emergencies. Seatrade's US editor **Claire Lyons** participated in a recent seminar in Houston and relates her experience.

Jim Calhoun, USCG Captain of the Port for the sprawling Eighth District spanning the entire US Gulf offered the CG perspective, 'Your first reaction to a casualty must involve thinking.'

Salvage master Jan ter Haar reminded students more than once that the master has the ultimate responsibility for the ves-

sel. He said, 'The master should take immediate action for the safety of crew, ship and cargo. The law gives him this authority and his management has to recognise this.'

On both the 'Griffin' and the 'Sea Lion', the exact location of the vessels, their watertight integrity, and damage assessments would be conducted as soon as possible. Once the 'Sea Lion' grounds, its drafts, trim/tidal conditions and cargo would be measured, it would be determined when men can be put onboard. As both ships are on fire – the extent of the fire, cargo condition, status of fire suppression systems, and potential risks are determined. Because a collision has occurred, the masters and salvors would establish whether there been a loss of power, loss of steering, and any other potential risks. As pollution is a factor, the master and his crisis team would be in touch with the appropriate authorities, keeping them abreast on the general status of the vessels. While everyone in the course knew the notification requirements by heart, Smit Americas' vice president and in-house attorney John Driscoll reminded, 'There should be no tolerance to any delay in reporting a casualty.'

For the fires, a product developed shortly before the Gulf War by American scientists called Pyrocool was introduced to the class. Capable of extinguishing even the most intense fires, Smit says it has revolutionized firefighting. One salvor labeled Pyrocool unforgettably, 'as incredible as Madonna.' Compared to traditional foam products which attack the oxygen component of the fire to extinguish flames, Pyrocool attacks the heat component. Because the heat is so dramatically reduced, there is little risk of spontaneous re-ignition. Water usage is also surprising low. Pyrocool is concentrated so a response requires far less of it than if traditional foam products are used. For the crisis off Montauk the class learned about a service from

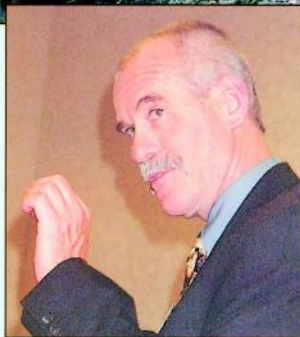


Pyrocool has revolutionized firefighting

BRIEFING - CRISIS MANAGEMENT



Being prepared – students undertake a firefighting exercise



ter Haar underscores master's role

Chemdata, an information source on chemical characteristics and problems one may encounter, and recommended approaches for emergency response situations.

The Master of the 'Griffin' would turn to the ship's contingency plan in order to provide an organized response. According to Smit Americas' vp Dick Fredricks, 'You must spend a few dollars wisely by maintaining a casualty contingency plan. Your plan needs to be tested to prepare you for hard line experience. And your plan must be flexible.' He cited Arco Marine's vessel casualty contingency manual for its simplicity, directness and effectiveness, giving a first hand account of how a good plan can be an aid to an effective response.

Captain Calhoun, who has seen more than his share of calamities in his 20 year

stint with the CG, described early steps in launching a response. 'A dual command center is extremely important,' Calhoun instructed. 'There will be two management tiers: One at corporate headquarters and one at the scene. The corporation must be in charge. Look at the National Contingency Plan,' he recommended. He observed the level of interest in marine casualties, 'goes all the way to White House.' Public relations specialist Guy Brown, of Brown, Nelson warned, 'Politicians inject themselves into the response increasing the pressure.'

National Response Corp's John Johnson gave a 'power point' presentation on response and shared priceless inside information, cautioning, 'If they are talking about federalizing a spill, then something has truly gone wrong.' Once federalized, Calhoun confirmed, 'The CG will conduct the response and present you with the bill.'

Other pitfalls emerged during the course making students uneasy, angry, or confident in turn. Drug and alcohol testing would be conducted as that question is always asked first. There was a level of candour during the sessions, the result of 'real world experience' that would be hard to replicate in a university course.

Experts like salvage master turned maritime attorney Jim Shirley of Haight Gardner counseled, 'Keep it in perspective. It's only a spill. No oil is worth injuring or killing someone during the response.'

Salvors believe the best oil spill clean up is no clean up; the result of protecting the stricken vessel, containing the oil, discharging the oil in a controlled manner if necessary, but in any case, keeping it out of the sea. Smit's Fredricks called the Oil Pollution Act a knee jerk reaction, observing, 'The Act starts with recovering oil instead of containing oil.'

During a simulator training session provided by the Massachusetts Maritime Academy's Center for Marine Environmental Protection and Safety, naval architect Rik Van Hemmen of the firm Martin, Ottaway, Van Hemmen & Dolan posed thought-provoking questions concerning when to abandon ship, whether to scuttle the ship or whether the ship will be lost making a marine casualty like the one off Montauk all too real. Some members of the class had been through harrowing incidents and Smit stood ready to provide extra help. An impromptu anchor handling class was arranged by ter Haar and an extra fire fighting class was launched for student's specific needs.

Back to the scenario off Montauk, the mayor moved swiftly, some say prematurely, to evacuate the town. The fishing and lobster industries were leveled necessitating prompt federal emergency assistance. Tourism was dealt a stunning blow. New laws were passed on the carriage of hazardous materials. The Master of the 'Griffin' was taken from a lifeboat directly to jail. The crew of the 'Sea Lion' was eventually recovered and bodies were stacked in a twenty foot refrigerated container for their final voyage. Every response company on the East and Gulf coasts were called in to assist with the clean-up as the P&I Clubs kept tabs on the operations. Months later, the shipping industry pushed for in-situ burns since most of the oil had burned off leaving little trace of the events on our dark and stormy night. Environmentalists fought the move and won.

Elliot explained why Smit offers the classes, 'We want the attendees to be prepared. Anyone, even the best of them, can have a marine emergency. We want them to have an idea about how to deal with it, what happens, who solves what. We make them aware before something goes horribly wrong.' ■