

International initiatives on the safe handling of cargo

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Introduction

There are two United Nations Agencies dealing with cargo handling matters at an international level in relation to the transport of cargoes by sea: The International Labour Organisation (ILO) and the International Maritime Organisation (IMO). The former, which was established in 1919, is concerned with issues of development and promotion of minimum international labour standards and is based in Geneva, whilst the latter, which was established in 1948, deals with all maritime matters, other than the employment of seamen and is based in London. In addition, ICHCA International, which was originally established in 1952, is the organisation that represents cargo-handling interests at an international level.

This article looks at a series of actions variously taken by the above mentioned organisations this year to improve cargo handling, culminating in meetings held at the end of September and beginning of October.

Conventions, Codes, Recommendations

The ILO has had Conventions on the safety and health of dockwork since 1929, with the current one dating from 1979. Known as ILO 152, it lays down principles to be observed in the loading and unloading of cargo ships and the consequential terminal operations and is supplemented by a Recommendation (#160) and a Code of Practice. First published in 1958, the Code of Practice explains how those principles might be attained and, after a major review, the third edition was published in February this year. Thus, the ILO provides a complete set of standards whereby national laws can prescribe how dockwork may be safely organised and carried out.

The IMO has over the years developed and published many Conventions, Codes, Guides and Recommendations that apply in one degree or another to cargo handling and it continues to be very active in this regard. The Maritime Safety Committee (MSC/80) in May approved the text of a Manual for Terminal Representatives on the Code of Safe Practice on the Loading and Unloading of Solid Bulk Cargoes (the BLU Code). The BLU Code was adopted in 1998 and introduced for the first time the concept of a terminal representative who liaises with the ship's master regarding all loading and unloading issues. The Manual is intended to guide the terminal representatives in their duties and it has since been published by the IMO in the form of an MSC Circular. In addition, DSC/10 (IMO's Dangerous Goods, Solid Cargoes and Containers Sub Committee) considered widening the scope of the BLU Code to include grain. This extensive but vital trade had been excluded because there was already a mandatory grain code. However, that deals with safe carriage by sea, whereas the BLU Code is concerned with loading and unloading and it is expected that this widening of the scope will be achieved, possibly next year.

MSC/80 also approved a set of guidelines on what constitutes a serious deficiency in a freight container such that it warrants an inspector duly approved under the IMO's Container Safety Convention (CSC) placing a prohibition on the onward movement of the box in the intermodal chain. These guidelines have also been issued by the IMO – in this case as a CSC circular – and it has been developed to assist such inspectors to determine whether a freight container is safe to be handled. ICHCA International's International

Safety Panel (ISP) at its recent 46th meeting in Odense agreed to incorporate this text into its pamphlet on the CSC and to recommend to the industry that it should adopt such criteria as well. The DSC/10 meeting at the end of September decided to provide for a reporting scheme whereby national governments can report to the IMO details of any resultant inspection systems on these deficiencies that they establish.

Dangerous goods

On the subject of dangerous goods, a number of measures/steps have been taken. DSC/10 has finalised the 33rd amendment to the International Maritime Dangerous Goods Code (IMDG Code), which will go to MSC/81 next May for approval and subsequent printing in the autumn of 2006, and deals with packaged dangerous goods. At the same time, MSC/80 approved a revision of the Code of Safe Practice for Solid Bulk Cargoes (the BC Code). This is the complementary Code that deals with dry bulk cargoes that have or could take on dangerous properties during carriage at sea. This is expected to be published shortly and, at the same time, MSC and DSC are working together to bring the BC Code into mandatory status internationally. The IMDG Code became mandatory on 1 January 2004 and it has been determined that the BC Code will follow. The effect will be to require all the signatories to the Safety of Life at Sea Convention 1974 (known as SOLAS) to give the code the force of law in their own national legislation, and subsequently, means apply it to their own flag fleets.

Another very relevant IMO publication concerning dangerous goods, despite having a lower status, is its Recommendations on the Safe Transport of Dangerous Goods in Port Areas. Originally published in 1973, the third edition was issued in 1995. This is widely used as the basis for port rules, laws and byelaws and DSC/10 continued with the process of revising it yet again. It is intended that that process will be finalised at DSC/11 and, having been approved by MSC, will be published in the early part of 2007.

Safe loading and loading

MSC/80 and DSC/10 have combined to initiate a new action relating to the loading and unloading of container ships. Research has shown that a considerable percentage of injuries to cargo handlers on marine terminals occur on board the ships being worked, and on container ships most of that is associated with lashing. It is not an easy task applying or removing deck lashings and it has been made considerably worse by the lack of proper and safe places of work being provided by some ships. As a result, MSC/80 decided to authorise the development of a new Annex to its Cargo Stowage and Securing (CSS) Code to provide for safe lashing operations on purpose built container ships. DSC was asked to carry out the work and DSC/10 established a correspondence group to develop the necessary text, which is the normal procedure. It will result in a new Annex being submitted to MSC for approval and subsequent publishing. The significance of this is that all cargo ships that carry cargoes that have to be stowed and secured are required to carry a Cargo Securing Manual, approved by the Flag State for that ship, and this manual must, in turn, be based upon the CSS Code. In the meantime, ISP/46 decided to expand its existing

Research Paper "Ships design considerations for stevedore safety" so as to deal with problems, solutions and how to manage the situation in the meanwhile.

Casualty and inspection reports

A further consideration of DSC/10 concerned casualty and inspection reports. Details of a small number of ship casualties were considered. Most concerned solid bulk cargoes but one involved the incorrect declaration of packaged dangerous goods in a freight container. Although the ship was not lost, it was severely damaged by the resultant fire arising from the container being inappropriately stowed due to lack of knowledge of its contents. This happened at sea and caused the ship to go into the nearest harbour for assistance. There have been 14 such accidents in 8 years and there is great concern in many quarters about the general implications. Accordingly, there are many actions being taken by the industry and the insurance world to try to improve awareness of the IMDG Code and its correct implementation. It has also put a spotlight on the actions of the enforcement agencies, and every year DSC receives reports from maritime administrations

regarding inspections that they have carried out of containers that have been declared as carrying dangerous goods. DSC/10 received a number of such reports, the average of which showed that approximately 1 in 5 of the boxes inspected had deficiencies in relation to the Code. This does show an improvement over previous years but, nevertheless, remains a substantial lack of compliance.

In addition, DSC/9 last year authorised a survey of all the IMO member nations to ascertain how many had such programmes and were conducting such inspections. The results were reported to DSC/10 and were most disappointing in that they showed that only 19 countries replied. These programmes were requested by an MSC circular of 1999 and that was revised by DSC/10 in order to encourage more such action.

These considerable international activities need to be reflected in the actions of those governmental agencies that have the duty to legislate, enforce, and cajole on the one hand, and the port and shipping industries on the other, to ensure that such international standards are reflected in day to day activities. Safer cargo handling will be the result.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mike Compton started work in the port industry with the Port of London Authority in 1953 and became its first full time Accident Prevention Officer in 1966. In 1983, he joined the national trade associations representing the industry in UK as Safety Adviser and founded the Ports Safety Organisation. Currently he is Chairman of ICHCA International's International Safety Panel, a member of the IAPH and of its Port Safety, Environment and Marine Operations Committee and has been the safety correspondent of Cargo Systems magazine for the past 29 years.

ABOUT THE ORGANISATION

ICHCA International Limited is an independent, non-political, non-governmental and non-profit distributing membership organisation established in 2003 dedicated to the promotion of safety and efficiency in the handling and movement of goods by all modes and during all phases of both national and international transport chains. It has 900 members in over 80 countries and members consist of ports, terminals, port authorities, container depots, academics and cargo specialists.

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