MEMBER ALERT

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IRON ORE LOADED IN INDIAN PORTS

Several vessels which recently loaded iron ore fines in India are reported to have suffered extreme danger at sea shortly after departure from load ports on account of serious shifting of cargo. The loading ports involved were Mangalore and Haldia.

Manufacturers typically produce iron ore of several grades which, when shipped, exhibit different physical properties. The grades presenting a liquefaction risk are those which comprise substantial amounts of finely-divided, powdered material, typically described as 'fines', 'sinter' or 'pellet feed'. The ore involved in recent incidents was, in each case, iron ore fines. It is believed the cargoes in question were loaded from open outdoor piles that had been exposed to rain during the monsoon season.

Under the provisions of regulation 2.1 in chapter VI (Carriage of cargoes) of the SOLAS, 1974 Convention, shippers shall provide the master or his representative with appropriate information on the cargo sufficiently in advance of loading to enable the precautions which may be necessary for proper stowage and safe carriage of the cargo to be put into effect and this information is to be confirmed in writing.

Furthermore, regulation 2.2.2 of chapter VI states that for cargoes that may liquefy, additional information in the form of a certificate on the moisture content of the cargo and transportable moisture limit (TML) must be provided.

Section 7 of the Code for Safe Practice for Solid Bulk Cargoes (BC Code) provides further information on precautions to be taken on cargoes that may liquefy. The provisions of BC Code state that the moisture content of the cargo in any one hold should not exceed its TML. In the above cases, however, it is believed shippers only provided certificates for moisture content and not the crucial information in respect of TML and, thereby, did not reveal the cargoes' dangerous flow characteristics.

Consequently, it must be stressed that Masters loading any kind of powered material, and in particular iron ore, at Indian ports should exercise extreme caution and query shippers/charterers in respect of the potential flow characteristics of the cargoes to be loaded.

For all materials susceptible to liquefaction, and thereby cargo shifting, certificates stating moisture content and the relevant TML should be obtained before any loading is allowed. **If Masters are not satisfied with information provided, or relevant information is not forthcoming, the Club should be contacted urgently for further advice.**