



GOOD CATCH from **The American Club**

Semi-Portable Fire Extinguisher Unfamiliarity

Description

A general cargo vessel's generator experienced a catastrophic failure while underway resulting in a fire that spread immediately to the bilges under the generator. A senior and a junior engineer were in the engine room and both heard a loud bang. The two engineers investigated and saw the fire. The automated alarm system sounded shortly after the fire started. The senior engineer saw the fire was in the bilges and knew that the foam fire

extinguisher was appropriate to use.

The senior engineer ran to the control room to notify the bridge and the Chief Engineer. He sent the junior engineer to the large semi-portable fire extinguisher with instructions to activate it and use it to fight the fire. The 125 lbs foam extinguisher was located in the engine room and was close enough to the generator that it would reach the fire.

After notifying the bridge and the Chief Engineer, the senior engineer expected to see the junior engineer already using the foam extinguisher. When he didn't, he ran from the control room to the semi-portable foam extinguisher and found the junior engineer struggling to determine how to activate it. He was trying to turn the lever on the top of the extinguisher but had not pulled out the safety pin.

The several-minute delay in using the fire extinguisher allowed the fire to spread and smoke was quickly filling the engine room. The smoke forced both engineers to evacuate. The bridge sounded the general alarm and the entire crew responded. When the engineers were accounted for, the engine room was isolated and the fixed CO₂ system was triggered to put out the fire.

During the investigation that followed, the junior engineer admitted he was not familiar with how to use that specific semi-portable fire extinguisher and became confused in the tension created by the emergency situation. He indicated the fire extinguisher was different from others that he had been trained to use. The senior engineer who was in the engine room at the time the fire started and the Chief Engineer both indicated that they assumed the junior engineer knew how to operate the semi-portable foam extinguisher since he was an experienced mariner.



Actual Damages

- ★ The fire caused damage in excess of \$250,000. Had the fire been quickly extinguished, the damage would have been substantially less.
- ★ The generator had to be completely rebuilt. The cause of the generator failure was determined to be the failure of a connecting rod at the crankshaft.

Potential Risks

The effectiveness of the crew in isolating the engine room by stopping the ventilation and closing all the vents and doors enabled the fixed CO₂ system to work as designed and extinguish the fire. Their training, experience and actions prevented further damage that could have significantly exceeded the actual damage and could have jeopardized the vessel itself.

Prevention

- ★ Crewmembers should be properly trained to ensure they are familiar with the specific fire extinguishers and fire extinguishing systems on the vessel.
- ★ Frequent training and drills ensure that the excitement and adrenaline surge that happens during an emergency do not lead to delays or prevent appropriate actions from being taken.
- ★ Make it a point of professional pride to learn how to properly operate all the fire extinguishing equipment and systems on the vessel.



When you identify a hazard before something goes wrong...

it's a Good Catch.

When you stop an operation before something bad happens...

it's a Good Catch.

When you ensure that crewmembers know how to operate the specific fire extinguishing equipment and systems on the vessel...

that's a Good Catch, too!



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