

Circular From NORTH

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The Danger of Failing to Follow the IMSBC Code

A recent investigation by the UK Marine Accident Investigation Branch (MAIB) into the circumstances surrounding an explosion on a vessel carrying incinerator bottom ash has highlighted the dangers of failing to comply with the International Maritime Solid Bulk Cargoes (IMSBC) Code requirements.

In this instance, the cargo generated hydrogen gas which leaked into an adjacent space. The emitted gas was ignited by a spark from an electrical panel and led to an explosion. The blast blew open the hatch covers and the chief engineer sustained burn injuries.

The incident illustrates the importance of following the requirements of the Code. Prior to commencing loading, the vessel must be provided with appropriate cargo information. This will allow the relevant schedule in the Code to be identified. This schedule will specify the hazards of the cargo and the precautions to be taken for safe carriage.

Where a cargo is not listed in the Code, section 1.3 specifies that details of the characteristics and properties should be presented to the competent authority at the port of loading in order that the requirements for safe carriage can be determined. In this case, unprocessed incinerator bottom ash is not listed in the IMSBC Code but was, nonetheless, declared by the shipper as a Group C cargo without the approval of the competent authority.

Where a cargo is deemed to present a risk of liquefaction (Group A) or to possess chemical hazards (Group B) then a tripartite agreement between the competent authorities at the load port, discharge port and the vessels Flag state on the conditions for carriage is needed. Should the cargo present no hazards (Group C) then the load port competent authority can authorise carriage independently.

The IMSBC Code provides sufficient information on a number of assessed cargoes, procedures to be followed for non-listed cargoes and methods of testing to ensure that if properly complied with bulk cargoes can be loaded and carried safely.

A conclusion from the MAIB investigation report supports this: *“it is likely that this accident would not have happened had the IMSBC Code requirements been followed, as the dangers would have been identified and procedures for safe carriage developed and implemented prior to loading.”*

A copy of the full MAIB report can be [read here](#).

Source of Information: North of England P&I Club