



Ship Type: All Trade Area: All

Bulletin 461 - 04/06 - Offshore Installation Exclusion Zones - Worldwide

The Club has been made aware of a serious incident earlier this year involving a general cargo ship entering the exclusion zone of an offshore platform. This bulletin details the incident and penalties that may be incurred, and may serve as a useful reminder to Officers on board ships of the consequences of entering such zones without permission, as well as the importance of maintaining a good radio watch at all times.

The general cargo ship concerned entered the 3000m Al Basra Oil Terminal (ABOT) oil platform warning zone, and was subsequently challenged by Coalition units on VHF radio channel 16. In this particular area, Coalition forces are tasked with the protection of port facilities. As the ship did not respond, the Coalition units approached and sounded five short blasts as well as firing flares to attract the ship's attention. Further, a coalition helicopter was immediately tasked to fly over the vessel and establish communications.

The ship's closest point of approach to the platform was 1.04 nautical miles, and as she got to this point and following a series of further attempts by Coalition forces to make contact, such contact was made and the ship was ordered to hold her position and prepare to be boarded.

After boarding and following an inspection the vessel was cleared to proceed. The coalition Boarding Officer asked the Master why he had not responded to VHF radio calls and other attempts by coalition units to attract his attention and establish communications. The Master responded that he understood that there was a warning zone around the platform, but that he entered it for the safe navigation of his ship as he was avoiding a chartered wreck and did not have enough sea room to the West of the zone because of the presence of anchored vessels across his intended course. The master also stated that he did not see any warning flares, and believed that Coalition units were closely shadowing him as part of standard marine security procedures around the platform.

The ship came dangerously close to being engaged by Coalition units acting under lawful rules of engagement as she had not attempted to establish communications, despite numerous attempts by coalition units to attract her attention, and was nearing the platform.

It was accepted that this incident, in hindsight and with full consideration of the facts, was a considered and necessary deviation from a planned navigational track in accordance with the prevailing circumstances and conditions. It was however considered unacceptable that the ship did not maintain a proper radio watch in confined waters and in such close proximity to the platform, and that the crew had such disregard for a known warning zone.

The UK Health & Safety Executive (HSE) has published a leaflet on safety zones around offshore oil and gas installations in waters around the UK. This leaflet, which can be viewed online at www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg189.htm, explains the purpose and significance of safety zones around offshore oil and gas installations, and the penalties for infringing a safety zone. It is an offence (under section 23 of the Petroleum Act 1987) to enter a safety zone unless authorised to do so.

Source of information: UK Maritime Trade Operations – Dubai
www.rncom.mod.uk/maritime/UKMTO/index.cfm