



Ship Type: All Trade Area: Worldwide

Bulletin 463 - 04/06 - Local use of Watertight Doors - Worldwide

This bulletin highlights an incident where a crewmember was found crushed in a watertight door onboard a passenger ship. This case is of particular interest because measures taken in order to comply with a regulation of SOLAS in fact put the ship in violation of the same regulation.

The crewmember found crushed had obviously been passing through the watertight door but the incident was not witnessed so the cause is not entirely known. An investigation into the death of the crewmember found that all watertight doors were closed because the ship was at sea. The crewmember must have operated the watertight door to open it or had tried to pass through as the door was closing behind someone else.

All watertight doors were closed on the passenger ship while at sea in compliance with SOLAS, which states that all watertight doors shall be kept closed during navigation except under some circumstances which includes allowing the passage of crew or passengers or when determined essential to the safe and effective operation of the ship's machinery (chapter 2, regulation 15 openings in watertight bulkheads in passenger ships, paragraph 9.1).

The method of closing all watertight doors onboard for the compliance of this chapter of SOLAS was done from the bridge by switching all watertight doors to the remote (also known as master) mode. This mode automatically closes all watertight doors and ensures they close again if they are operated locally. The alternative mode (local) allows each watertight door to be left in the open or closed position using local controls. According to SOLAS (chapter 2, regulation 15 openings in watertight bulkheads in passenger ships, paragraph 8.1), **the "doors closed" (remote) mode shall only be used in an emergency or for testing purposes.** Therefore the ship was in breach of SOLAS regulations.

A central operating console on the navigation bridge indicates to the bridge team the open/closed status of each watertight door. In order to comply with regulation 15 of chapter 2 of SOLAS, passenger ships must have all watertight doors closed while navigating and these should be closed locally. The bridge team can monitor the status of all watertight doors from the bridge and ensure that any watertight doors that are opened are closed after use.

Watertight doors can be dangerous and all members of the crew should be instructed in their safe operation. The UK Code of Safe Working Practices for Merchant Seamen advises that particular care should be taken when using power operated watertight doors which have been closed from the bridge. If opened locally, under these circumstances the door will re-close automatically with a force sufficient to crush anyone in its path as soon as the local control has been released. The local controls are positioned on each side of the door so that a person passing through may open the door and then reach to the other control to keep the door in the open position until transit is complete. As both hands are required to operate the controls, no person should attempt to carry any load through the door unassisted.

Some of the ship's senior officers stated during the investigation of this incident that crewmembers may think that by only partially opening the door they are committing less of a violation of the instructions given to them not to traverse closed doors. In fact this would make getting through the door in time more difficult and potentially more dangerous. Similarly, the officers explained that some crewmembers may attempt to quickly get through a closing door already opened by another crewmember. The dangers of these actions are real and need to be appreciated by all crewmembers.



Source of information: Loss Prevention Department
UK P&I Club