

Bad stowage cases, wire rod in coils at Novorossiysk port

Notwithstanding the position of English Admiralty Court in the well-known EEMS SOLAR case extending basis on which the Ship Owners can avoid responsibility for cargo operations, in particular their liability for losses resulting from the movement of cargo during the voyage, the Owners will still be held liable under certain circumstances.

According to some other decisions by the English courts, the responsibility for stowage can be transferred to a Charterer or Shipper subject to the Charter Party terms incorporated in the Bill of Lading.

However, unless specific provisions in the contract of carriage are agreed by the parties, duty to load and stow the goods properly, *prima facie* rests with the Owner.

At Novorossiysk port the steel cargoes are loaded by stevedores appointed by Charterers or Shippers under the Master's supervision. Despite the generally high level of professional competence of the foremen responsible for stowage and lashing of cargo, the cases of bad stowage causing cargo to shift and stow to collapse during the voyage are not an exception and still occur occasionally.

This articles focuses on the problems associated with the stowage of steel wire rods produced by NLMK and shipped from Novorossiysk port. First trial shipments from ports of Novorossiysk and Tuapse were made in 2016, since then the export volumes have been steadily increasing. Tuapse port is not under discussion here due to absence of the similar issues nowadays.

Among various coils of wire rod exported by several mills, those produced by NLMK have proved to be the most problematic for proper stowage due to the following reasons:

- a) Comparatively short length of bundle (coil) which is sometimes equal to the coil's diameter requires extra care when stowing as the coil may overturn easily.
- b) It appears that some of these coils may have insufficient stiffness to retain original shape in the course of cargo handling or when stored at port. The cylindrical form of many coils is often skewed, with the windings shifted and inclined along the coil's axis instead of being perpendicular. Deformation occurs at any stage of the pre-shipment transportation or storage. It might be difficult or impossible to ensure the tight and uniform block stow when intact and deformed coils are loaded together.



Deformed coil prior to loading



Overturned coil in cargo hold

In one recent case a bulk carrier loaded steel wire rods in coils destined to the United States.

The stowage of cargo was commenced as per standard practice, with cores pointing fore and aft, using a fork-lift truck in the underdeck spaces to stow the first 4 tiers along bulkheads, and aiming to ensure the coils in successive tiers overlap the coils below.

There was a high percentage of deformed coils causing some rows to collapse locally. From the middle tiers, the stevedores started positioning and stowing coils chaotically, as they could not (or simply did not want to make an effort to) achieve uniform and tight block stowage.



Bulk stowage of wire rod in coils

The critical moment was missed by the crew and no attempt was made to intervene or stop cargo operations to request correct and safe stowage. The cargo was not re-stowed. A note of protest was lodged by the Master in this respect.

On arrival at the discharge port, the vessel faced a substantial claim for unsafe stowage from the stevedores.

In the other case the negative consequences were avoided owing to the Chief Officer's permanent control and immediate reaction. The loading of the hold in question was suspended, a Protest issued. The stevedores had to accept the vessel's requirements to re-stow the shifted and collapsed coils and to apply sufficient amount of timber dunnage to level the stow.



Coils of wire rod correctly stowed, timber dunnage applied to re-stow the collapsed coil

Practical advice

- When discussing a stowage plan with stevedores, the Master and Chief Officer to request
 - uniform and tight block stowage
 - sufficient timber dunnage to level the stow and fill the gaps where necessary
 - postpone loading of the most deformed coils till completion of cargo operations to stow them in the last upper tiers (remember that no cargo can be rejected from loading)
- Permanent control of loading and stowage is crucial to prevent attempt of bulk stowage.
- Should the Master not be satisfied with any aspect of the stow, cargo operations in the particular hold to be suspended and the stevedores be instructed to re-stow the cargo properly.