JAPAN P&I CLUB
日本船主責任相互保険組合

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JAPAN P&I NEWS

To the Members

USA－Verification of Air Draft and Navigational Safety Management

We have obtained information regarding Marine Safety Alert 17-26 issued by the United States Coast Guard (USCG) concerning the verification of a vessel's actual configuration and maximum air draft. This alert was issued following an incident in which a deep-draft vessel contacted a bridge while transiting beneath an overhead structure.

This incident occurred because outdated plans were used for the air draft calculation, leaving a tiltable antenna unaccounted for. Contact casualties resulting from such insufficient pre-transit verification or unrecorded equipment modifications can occur across all vessel types. For further details, please refer to USCG Marine Safety Alert 17-26.

Such contact casualties with overhead structures have also occurred due to factors beyond insufficient pre-transit verification, such as over-reliance on previous passage plans or checks made by predecessors, non-use of the ECDIS height checking function, and continuing to navigate despite uncertainties regarding safe clearance. Members are encouraged to ensure that verification protocols and management procedures based on this alert are not treated as a one-off exercise, but are integrated into their daily safety management through the continuous education of the Master and navigating officers to foster a true safety culture. Ensuring that essential procedures—such as preparing the Pilot Card—are carried out thoroughly rather than as a routine formality, and always reflect the most accurate and up-to-date information is key to preventing equipment damage and severe accidents. Members and management companies are invited to consider integrating the following practical precautions into their Safety Management Systems (SMS).

- **Reviewing air draft calculation standards and safe transit guidelines within the SMS**
  While many management companies likely already stipulate "minimum air clearance requirements" for passing under bridges or overhead cables within the SMS, we recommend taking this opportunity to review these existing procedures. It is highly beneficial to ensure that these guidelines are practical, easily understood by the crew, and include comprehensive procedures for accurate air draft calculations, as well as the utilisation of the ECDIS route and height checking functions.

- **Ensuring accurate verification of the vessel's highest point and updating information**
  Accurately identifying all elements affecting the vessel's vertical profile, including movable or adjustable equipment such as antennas, and utilising designated, up-to-date plans for voyage planning are essential. It is vital to verify details independently rather than relying solely on previous plans or checks made by predecessors. Whenever modifications, installations, or removals occur, we recommend updating the air draft information immediately and appropriately managing superseded information to prevent inadvertent use.

- **Integrating into passage plans and thorough pre-transit checks**
  To ensure practical effectiveness on site, it is beneficial to systematically incorporate air draft calculations and

transit restrictions into the comprehensive berth-to-berth passage plan. In addition, when a pilot embarks, we suggest recording the accurate and up-to-date air draft information on the Pilot Card to facilitate a thorough Master/Pilot Exchange (MPX) and mutual agreement before any transfer of conn or responsibility occurs. Furthermore, when a transit requires movable equipment to be lowered or adjusted, incorporating a positive verification process into the port-entry, port-departure or bridge-transit procedures, and ensuring early measures such as altering course, reducing speed, or stopping are taken while there is still ample sea room if any uncertainty arises during transit, are highly recommended.

- **Sharing at Shipboard Safety and Health Committee meetings (Fostering a safety culture)**
  We suggest sharing this matter at Shipboard Safety and Health Committee meetings and exchanging views among all crew members on why verifying the air draft and maintaining up-to-date information are necessary, using this opportunity to foster a strong safety culture across both ship and shore rather than treating SMS procedures as mere paperwork.

We will continue to provide the latest information and technical insights to assist our Members in preventing accidents and promote safe operations.

Yours faithfully,

The Japan Ship Owners' Mutual Protection & Indemnity Association