
Possible Hazards to Seamen from Oils Used on Ships

Notice to Shipowners, Masters and Crews

1. The prevention of risks to the health and safety of a ship's crew is not only a statutory duty but an essential part of the efficient running of a vessel. To provide information about health and safety on board ship the Department of Transport has published the "Code of Safe Working Practices for Merchant Seamen". The purpose of this notice is to draw the attention of Owners, Masters and Crews to the health hazards which may arise from contact with some of the range of different oils used for fuel, lubrication and the operation of hydraulic systems on a ship.

2. In particular, Masters and Crew should be aware that materials such as residual fuel oil and used or spent engine oil contain substances (poly aromatic hydrocarbons, PAHs) which are known to be carcinogenic (cancer causing) and are therefore subject to the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health (COSHH) Regulations 1988 and more specifically the COSHH approved Code of Practice on the Control of Carcinogenic Substances. Although the COSHH Regulations do not extend to ships at sea, Masters should refer to guidance note EH58 "The Carcinogenicity of Mineral Oils" published by the Health and Safety Executive, which, if followed, will ensure that the safeguards recommended in the Code of Safe Working Practice for Merchant Seamen are met.

3. In addition to any carcinogenic effects, contact between oil and human skin may lead to a range of skin complaints ranging from mild irritation to severe oil acne. Thus contact must be avoided by the use of suitable precautionary measures such as barrier creams and protective clothing as recommended in the "Code of Safe Working Practices for Merchant Seamen" (Sections 1.2.7 and 1.2.8). Advice on the safe handling of oils is given in the product data sheets which the suppliers must supply with the materials (see "M" Notice No. 1520). Masters should ensure that the information on these sheets is available to all crew members who may come into contact with the materials.

4. Further information:

(1) "The Carcinogenicity of Mineral Oils" Guidance Note EH58. Published by the Health and Safety Executive and available from HMSO or:

HSE Sales Point
St Hugh's House
Stanley Precinct
Bootle
Merseyside L20 3QY
Price (December 1991) £2.25.

(2) "Code of Safe Working Practices for Seamen". Published by and available from HMSO.

Price (December 1991) £6.60.

Department of Transport
Marine Directorate
London WC1V 6LP
March 1993

© Crown copyright 1993