

MISLEADING SAFETY SIGNAGE & IMPROPER STORAGE OF FUEL SAMPLES (When a Lifejacket Box isn't what it seems...)



- SIRE 2.0 – 5.4.6. Were the lifebuoys, and associated lights, smoke floats and lifelines, in good order, clearly marked and correctly distributed around the ship?
- SIRE 2.0 – 5.11.1. Were the Master and officers familiar with the company procedures addressing the management of samples of bunker fuel oil and Annex I and/or Annex II cargoes as applicable, and were samples being properly stored and eventually disposed of?
- RISQ - Item 4.22 Are IMO symbols to identify the location of life saving equipment, firefighting equipment and hazardous areas displayed appropriately and in good condition?
- ISGOTT - 13.3.2 Sample storage
- IMO RESOLUTION - A.760(18) - Symbols related to Life-Saving Appliances and Arrangements
- IMO - SOLAS - Chapter III Regulation 7 - Personal life-saving appliances (10 Marking of stowage locations)

FINDING

During an onboard PSC Preparation, the PAS Auditor observed a storage box on deck clearly marked with the IMO symbol for lifejackets, indicating that emergency life-saving equipment was stored inside. However, when opening the box, the auditor found that it contained fuel oil samples retained by the Engineering Department. This storage practice is misleading and potentially hazardous. In the event of an emergency, crew members may waste critical time searching for lifejackets that are not in their designated locations, thereby compromising the effectiveness of evacuation process and overall safety onboard.

IMPORTANCE

Signage and symbols on board vessels serve a critical safety purpose, providing clear and immediate information during emergencies, when every second counts. Incorrect or misleading signage can lead to confusion, delay emergency response actions, and endanger lives. Furthermore, fuel samples are flammable materials and must be stored in designated and approved areas. Storing such materials in a compartment marked for life-saving appliances introduces a fire hazard. This finding highlights a breakdown in onboard discipline and interdepartmental communication concerning the proper use and labeling of storage areas.

LESSONS LEARNED

- Ensure that all signage accurately reflects the actual contents of each box, locker, or storage compartment.
- Conduct regular safety rounds to verify that markings, signage, and equipment locations are correct and consistent throughout the vessel.
- Promote effective communication between departments to prevent misunderstandings regarding space usage and responsibilities.
- Incorporate signage verification as part of routine onboard safety inspections and internal audits.
- Use this incident as a case study during safety meetings to reinforce situational awareness and good safety practices.