

# DANGER INVOLVED IN THE HANDLING WOOD PELLETS

## For urgent circulation

**Cargoes of wood pellets can emit carbon monoxide may result in a poisonous and explosive environment.**



A seaman was killed, three seamen were slightly injured, two dockworkers were injured (one very seriously and still in intensive care), two firemen and three ambulance men were also injured after being overcome with carbon monoxide fumes while discharging wood pellets from a large bulk carrier, Saga Spray, registered in Hong Kong.

### **Background:**

The ship had been loaded in Vancouver and sailed to Sweden via Panama – a three-week voyage – and the wood pellets cargo was a routine delivery to the local power station in the Swedish town of Helsingborg.

It is a well known fact that there is a risk of spontaneous combustion if the product becomes damp or if the temperature should rise to over 50°C; also that there is a risk for dust explosion, that the product can cause oxygen depletion and that caution should be taken when entering sealed-off areas.

**It is not generally known however that the product emits carbon monoxide which is both poisonous and highly flammable.**

### **Events:**

Having discharged the bulk of the cargo by grab in hatch 9, a front loader was to be lifted aboard by the shore crane to facilitate the final operation. The access to the hatch was sealed and a duty officer ordered a crewman to open all the access points. The waiting driver, a regular dockworker, happened to look down into the access and saw the seaman suddenly fall from the third platform down to the deck where he lay lifelessly. The Driver hurried to his assistance but was overcome by the fumes and in the ensuing rescue operations dockers, seamen, firemen and ambulance personnel were also injured – in all, twelve were transported to hospital in various states of consciousness and five of these were treated in decompression chambers.

### **Subsequent action:**

With the help of the Fire Brigade, we subsequently measured the atmosphere in two of the other hatches that were still fully loaded and sealed. We discovered incredibly high concentrations of carbon monoxide which quickly dispersed after the hatch had been opened. A spark at the point of time, just when, or just after opening the hatch, would have been enough to cause an enormous explosion.

According to the Port Stevedoring Company and some experts they have consulted, everyone was caught completely by surprise by the presence of this gas. We have subsequently learned however that it is common knowledge to many in the industry

including the Canadian company, Premium Pellet Company of British Columbia who sold the cargo. They regularly inform all ships loading pellets (including Saga Spray) of the risks in the SCIS that follows the cargo. It is also mentioned in the IMO regulations for bulk cargoes. We also learned that a very similar accident which killed one docker and injured three others occurred in the Port of Rotterdam May 10 2002. It was a very similar ship, "Weaver Arrow", with the same cargo from the same company.

That an almost identical accident can be repeated can only be due to negligence and we must take all the necessary steps to make sure that it doesn't happen again and that proceedings are taken against those responsible.

The condition of the injured dockworker is, at the time of writing, still critical. He shows all the symptoms of a stroke although the hospital doctors say it is not. They suspect a chemical reaction of carbon monoxide with some other substance.

Peter Shaw.  
Swedish Dockworkers Union Local 6.