

30 October 2002

FLEET/SAFETY LETTER 02057.GEN

RE: MEDICAL ALERT

It is with great sadness and concern that we are distributing this medical alert to the fleet.

This year the Vanuatu fleet has experienced an unusual number of deaths that are not related to a casualty or industrial accident. The fleet has experienced 11 such deaths in 2002. This is a sharp increase of more than 700% over previous years, where we have averaged 1.55 deaths per year. The causes of death range in nature from heart attacks (the majority) to a suicide, and in all cases there had been no previous indication of illness, either mental or physical.

The following are the statistics as we currently know them:

Vessel Type	Nationality	Rank	Age	Malady
Pipe Laying Barge	Indian	Mechanic	61	Heart Attack
MODU	Jordanian	Assistant Driller	55	Heart Attack
MODU	British	Transit Passenger	54	Heart Attack
OSV	Indonesian	Master	54	Heart Attack
OSV	Russian	Chief Engineer	57	Heart Attack
Pipe Laying Barge	American	Anchor Foreman	47	Encephalitis
Seismic Survey	Filipino	Chief Engineer	54	Heart Attack
OSV	Yugoslavian	Chief Mate	63	Suicide
OSV	American	Master	49	Drug Related Heart Attack
Derrick Barge	American	Barge Administrator	30	Drug Overdose
Seismic Survey	Filipino	Chief Engineer	54	Heart Attack

We can identify very little correlation between these tragedies. Our investigations have focused on everything from the mariner's physical examination prior to document issue, to the circumstances of death: watchstanding cycles, the vessel's regulatory requirements (ISM, STCW), etc. All were given approval to sail based on their physical examinations; half were on watch at the time of their death; and over half of the vessels fell under ISM and/or STCW requirements. The victims were from all segments of the industry; were of varying nationalities; and had varying job functions.

The heart attack victims are in an age range that could be considered a "high risk" group, but this does not explain the increased number over previous years. In the case of encephalitis, it is believed that symptoms were masked by alcoholism, ultimately causing the mariner's death.

We have no answers or conclusions to the question of ‘why has the fleet experienced such a sharp increase in these types of deaths’? We are currently contacting other organizations both within the industry, as well as outside medical organizations. If there are any definitive answers we will pass them on, but for now, we just wanted to raise your awareness and elicit your comments.

We extend our heart felt condolences to the friends and families of the men who have passed this year. Our best wishes to all.

“For all at last return to the sea, to Oceanis, the Ocean River, like the ever flowing stream of time, the beginning and the end.” –Rachel Carson, *The Sea Around Us*.

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