

IUMI calls for improved firefighting systems on board container vessels



19th September 2017

With the growing size of container vessels, and a recent spate of fires on board these ships, IUMI is concerned that current firefighting provisions are insufficient.

The International Union of Marine Insurance (IUMI) has published today - Tuesday 19 September - a position paper calling for better on board firefighting systems for container vessels.

Fires on board container vessels are very real threats. Recent examples include fires on NNCI Arauco (9,000 TEU) in September 2016 during welding operations whilst alongside in Hamburg, Hanjin Pennsylvania (4,000 TEU) in November 2002 claiming the lives of two crew members and resulting in a constructive total loss; and MSC Flaminia (6,732TEU) in July 2012, resulting in three fatalities and also a constructive total loss.



Whilst IUMI expressly welcomes the 2014 amendment to the International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS) to increase the effectiveness of firefighting, the association believes more should be done.

Helle Hammer, IUMI Political Forum Chair said:

“Recent amendments to SOLAS are a move in the right direction but they do not go far enough. The legal requirements prescribed by SOLAS were originally developed for fires on board general cargo vessels and these ships are structurally very different to a container vessel; and cargo is stored differently. We believe the mode of firefighting set out in SOLAS is not suitable for a modern containership.”

IUMI supports as best practice a proposal presented by the German Insurance Association GDV that sets out an improved concept for firefighting facilities on board a containership.

Uwe-Peter Schieder, Marine and Loss Prevention, GDV, explains:

“We believe a new technical solution is needed to improve current firefighting practice on container vessels, particularly as these ships are continuing to grow in size.”

“We suggest creating individual fire compartments below deck to prevent fire from spreading. These compartments would be fitted with fixed Co2 and water-based firefighting systems. Boundary structures would also be fitted above deck to align with the water-cooled bulkheads below and also fitted with fixed fire-fighting systems. In addition, we also recommend the installation of enhanced fire detection systems”.

GDV’s suggestions and IUMI’s position paper can be found [here](#)

Mindful of the increasing size and complexity of modern containerships, IUMI believes that it is necessary for further steps to be taken to improve the safety of the crew, the cargo and the ships themselves. IUMI recommends further discussions with the IMO, flag states, class and relevant industry stakeholders on how best to improve the fire detection, protection and firefighting capabilities on board container vessels.