

5. Summary

The Shiretoko passenger ship sinking accident was primarily caused by a malfunction in the bow deck hatch and the failure to properly secure it. Additionally, the vessel departed despite the operational standard indicating a risk of wind speeds reaching 8 m/s or wave heights exceeding 1.0 m.

According to the accident investigation report, the fundamental background of the accident lies in the fact that the passenger ship operator had “no effective operational management in place and lacked a proper safety management system.”

In general, a safety management system functions effectively and enables continuous improvement based on the PDCA cycle when the following resources and systems are properly established and maintained under the leadership of top management.

- **Personnel:** Masters and operational managers who are familiar with the navigation area and possess sufficient ship-handling and decision-making skills
- **Equipment:** Vessels with adequate seaworthiness suited to the navigation area
- **System:** Operational management processes, which is core of safety management systems, and standardized procedures of it

The foundation for establishing an effective safety management system is a thorough understanding of the "**characteristics of the operational area.**"

While safety management systems should be tailored to the scale and nature of the business, small passenger vessel operators, particularly those with limited resources, should first focus on strengthening their operational management processes. This involves **identifying potential risks in their operating waters**, standardizing procedures, and continuously improving them.

By making operational management the core of their safety framework, operators can ensure that daily procedures and navigation decisions are carried out "consistently," "in strict adherence to the basics," and "with vigilance and discipline." Over time, this commitment fosters continuous improvement in safety management system and helps build a strong safety culture.

Message from the head of accident prevention analysis office

As winter transitions into spring once again, we are reminded that the sea never presents the same face regardless of the seasons. It responds with due severity to any careless judgments or actions by operators.

In the passenger vessel industry, where many lives are entrusted to each voyage, precise assessment of sea conditions and prioritizing safety above all else are essential.

As the season of “Ningwachi Kajimai” comes to an end in Okinawa, waters near mainland Japan enter the period of “May Storms” (spring tempests), driven by rapidly developing extratropical cyclones. Understanding the unique characteristics of one's operating waters and identifying necessary measures to ensure passenger safety are crucial. I hope this digest serves as a useful resource for reflection on these vital considerations.

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