

Salcombe Harbour Board – 18 December 2006

SALCOMBE FISH QUAY INCIDENT – 11 SEPTEMBER 2006

Report of Head of Service Salcombe Harbour

Statutory Powers: Pier and Harbour Order (Salcombe) Confirmation Act 1954

Financial Implications: None

Purpose

The purpose of this report is to present the findings of the Harbour Master's Investigation into the Fish Quay incident on 11 September 2006 which resulted in a vehicle running away down the slipway into the estuary whilst loading crab.

Recommendations

That the Harbour Board note the findings and endorse the recommendations to:

- a. Formalise a safe system of work to be employed by fishermen operating on the fish quay and slipway to include transferring crab from storage boxes to road vehicles.**
- b. Review the Harbour Risk Assessments.**

Background

1. Crab caught by Salcombe's fishermen is stored in boxes moored in the estuary until they are transferred to vehicles on the slipway; this process is known colloquially as "tipping out". In preparation for tipping out, the store box is towed to the slipway where it is secured, as the tide falls the box dries, a vehicle is then reversed down to the box. The vehicle's wheels are chocked and the transfer commences. Personnel load crabs into fish boxes from the store box and load them to the refrigerated vehicle.
2. At approximately 1600 on Monday 11 September 2006 a truck involved in tipping out rolled backwards into the estuary from the Fish Quay slipway at Salcombe. There were no injuries and the vehicle was recovered, pollution was minimised by the use of a containment boom.
3. This report has been compiled following interviews between the Harbour Master and the personnel involved in the incident, a study of the fish quay CCTV records and a vehicle inspection conducted by VOSA.

Sequence of Events

4. On this occasion the vehicle, a Volvo truck registration number P165 WCK, owned by Mr R Johnstone was being operated by Mr M Yeoman.
5. Mr Yeoman reversed the truck to the store box at 1508, reportedly securing the truck with brakes and a single chock.

6. At 1628, eighty minutes into the evolution, the vehicle rolled backwards into the store box and subsequently into the sea. The incident, from the vehicle starting to move to coming to a standstill in the water, lasted for less than 15 seconds. Mr Yeoman, who was working at the rear of the lorry jumped clear and attempted to enter the cab to stop the vehicle, his efforts failed. The other 2 personnel working in the rear of the truck and on the store box, Mr D Powlesland and Mrs E Walker, climbed clear. There were no physical injuries.
7. Mr Yeoman informed Salcombe Harbour Authority (SHA) of the incident. SHA boomed the vehicle to contain any pollution and coordinated the recovery operation. The Harbour Master made a decision that this was a level one pollution event that was containable with harbour resources.
8. The vehicle was eventually pulled clear of the water by approximately 1930. This was achieved by a combination of a crane lifting the rear wheels over the slipway sill whilst a tractor winch pulled it laterally up the slipway.
9. The oil that had been contained within the pollution boom was mopped up with absorbent pads and the entire boom recovered and bagged for disposal by the harbour staff. Only a very small amount of pollution escaped the boom into the estuary.
10. The following morning the Estuary Environmental Officer, Mr N Mortimer, conducted an inspection of Batson Creek for any signs of oil pollution. He reported several 4-5 cm oil 'slicks' which were, in his opinion, probably natural oils from anaerobic mudflat bio-activity.
11. The vehicle was subjected to a full mechanical inspection by VOSA who confirmed that the braking system, including the hand brake mechanism were in working order.

Observations

12. The fishermen have been encouraged to self regulate their activities on the fish quay. There has been no direct involvement of the Harbour Authority in their activities.
13. The harbour risk assessment for Slipways and landings does not identify a vehicle rolling into the sea as a significant risk, and therefore no specific control items have been identified.
14. The use of a single chock to prevent a heavy refrigerated lorry rolling down the slipway is insufficient.
15. Wheel chocks must be fit for purpose, a piece of wood is inappropriate and ineffectual.
16. VOSA believe that it was possible that if chocks were used that the hand brake may not have been applied.
17. During the transfer of crab from the store box to the vehicle, the weight was transferred until the weight in the vehicle was too much for the ineffectual chock to hold, causing the accident.

Lessons Identified

18. Salcombe Harbour Authority should, in conjunction with the Salcombe Shell Fishermen's Group, improve the working practices on the fish quay in general and slipway in particular. This should include the production of an agreed safe system of work based on a comprehensive risk assessment.
19. Vehicles involved in tipping out should, when parked on the slipway:
 - have the handbrake applied
 - be left in gear
 - have all wheels chocked with specialised chocks
20. The Harbour Master should, in conjunction with the Salcombe Shell Fishermen, formalise a safe system of work to be employed by fishermen working on the fish quay and slipway to include transferring crab from storage boxes to road vehicles.
21. The Harbour Risk Assessments should be reviewed and any control items identified should be completed.

Conclusion

22. This was an incident which could have had serious if not fatal consequences. It was almost certainly caused by operator error in that the hand brake was not applied correctly or the chock was not inserted or the chock used was inadequate for the task. There has been no direct supervision of the fisherman's activities on the fish quay, they have been allowed to self regulate. The direct involvement in fish quay activities by the Harbour Master is essential if a safe working environment is to be maintained. Furthermore the Harbour Authorities' risk assessment for slipways and landings is incomplete and requires revision.

I A Gibson
Head of Service Salcombe Harbour

Harbour Board
18 December 2006

Information: Mr P Osborne, Health and Safety Advisor
South Hams District Council