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Problem of leaking hatch covers adds to cargo loss claims

The bulk of cargo loss or damage claims arise from leaking hatch covers that allow water into holds, according to Britannia P&I club

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Due diligence, maintenance, regular checks and training will all help to improve cargo moisture damage, says loss prevention manager Captain Shajed Khan



HATCH COVERS SHOULD BE PROPERLY TIGHTENED TO BE ABLE TO WITHSTAND ANY TYPE OF SEA CONDITION, A WEBINAR HEARD.

LEAKING hatch covers have been responsible for an overwhelming number of cargo losses or damage claims from bulkers, according to Britannia P&I.

Other issues include water ingress from the bilge or ballast system, too much ballast remaining on board, and loose rust contaminating the cargo.

Hatch covers should be properly tightened to be able to withstand any type of sea condition.

“Prevention is better than cure,” the club’s loss prevention manager Captain Shajed Khan said in a recent webinar.

Preventative measures include following correct procedures, due diligence, carrying out maintenance and regular checks, he said, adding that training was a key component in avoiding issues. The master and crew must be suitably qualified to carry out their functions.

Even shore staff such as chartering and operations teams should have the knowledge for correct cargo acceptance and handling.

When classification societies carry out ship inspections to check the thickness of the cargo holds or ballast tanks, they do not carry out integrity tests unless there is a known or suspected leak, according to Capt Khan.

“Just because a ship has passed a class survey does not necessarily mean it will pass a weathertight integrity test and is cargo worthy,” he said.

IMCS, the marine consultants and surveyors, said of the 443 dry cargo vessels that they had inspected for cargo worthiness, 3,510 hatch cover-related defects were found, consisting of 600 related to packing rubbers and 383 related to bearing pads, while it appeared that 95 ships did not have a hatch cover manual on board.

Ultrasound testing is a “great tool in the hands of an experienced operator,” its chairman Walter Vervloesem said during the webinar, adding that one can only conclude that hatch covers are weathertight when the test is supplemented with a thorough visual inspection.

Hold bilges require a “proper visual inspection” as well as a suction test and a test for backflow, he said. Ballast tanks required pressure testing, while hold preparation needed fresh water washing and silver nitrate tests.

Risks could include improper use and wrong evaluation of the test results, but “qualified and certified operators have been trained for correct use and interpretation of test and inspection results,” he added.