

NI Log

London Branch

Ship to Ship (STS) Lightering – a mooring master’s perspective

Outside of the normal monthly joint meeting schedule, the London Branch, in conjunction with the Honourable Company of Master Mariners, recently hosted a presentation by Capt Graham Gonyou MNI, on ship to ship lightering operations. Graham is an experienced mooring master, working mainly in the Gulf of Mexico theatre of operations; his presentation described best practice and how to mitigate the inherent risks.

In front of a large audience, Graham began by observing that 25% of oil imported into the US is by STS lightering, with about 1400 operations per year in the Gulf of Mexico lightering areas. As a result, the STS transfer market has become more competitive with several service providers to choose from. He explored the relationship between owners and service providers and how they had to work together to ensure safe operation, particularly as any incident will prove expensive. Experienced personnel are necessary and the training for mooring masters is necessarily extensive. A high standard of training is key to maintaining a safe industry and imparting knowledge with briefing and debriefing after operations is a fundamental part of that training; as is the use of simulators.

Contingency planning is another important aspect and the mooring master should be prepared for any untoward happenings. Using illustrations, Graham showed how much thought should be given to mooring arrangements and equipment and how the equipment used must be fit for purpose. He described the use of fenders and the relationship between the length of the fender string and the parallel body length. The OCIMF publication “Ship to Ship Transfer Guide” is a particularly valuable resource.

Good communication between the Masters of the two vessels and the mooring master is vital for the safe operation and all concerns of both vessels should be addressed before commencing the manoeuvre. Checklists developed by the industry are really useful.

Again using slides taken on board, Graham showed the various movements necessary in bringing the ships together, the problems of interaction, the processes for cargo working and the procedures for disconnecting, unmooring and making a safe departure.

He concluded by observing that a mooring master must make the job routine and forgettable, put the teams at ease, communicate and abide by the high standards of the industry.

Unfortunately, due to the length of the presentation there was little time for questions, however, the audience left with a comprehensive view of STS operations.