



Nuclear Free Local Authorities Steering Committee

information

NFLA Media release - for immediate release, 22nd October 2015

NFLA welcomes official accident report of the 'Atlantic Cartier' ship fire and its confirmation of weaknesses in cargo manifests for a number of its dangerous goods consignments (including all radioactivity consignments)

The Nuclear Free Local Authorities (NFLA) welcomes the publication of a final accident evaluation report of the Swedish-flagged vessel '*Atlantic Cartier*', which had been transporting radioactive materials as part of its load in a major fire accident in Hamburg port. The vessel had arrived from Liverpool port, and regularly docks at UK ports to collect dangerous and other materials. (1)

The NFLA has taken a real interest in this incident, as it is symptomatic of wider concerns it has with the transportation of radioactive materials by sea in vessels which it believes are not up to the task, are often aging and may contain some critical safety flaws.

On May 1st, 2013 a fire broke out on the *Atlantic Cartier* whilst it was docked at Hamburg port. Three tugs, two fireboats and over 200 firefighters took several hours to fully control the fire and douse the flames to make it safe. As well as containing a cargo of some 70 cars (30 of which were badly damaged), the vessel was also transporting 9 tons of uranium hexafluoride (UF₆), a radioactive highly volatile and toxic compound most commonly used as an intermediate material in the production of nuclear fuel. The vessel also had 180 tons of flammable ethanol and 4 tons of explosives at the time the fire broke out. The nuclear fuel was being taken to the uranium-enriching facility in Lingen, Lower Saxony. Radioactive material shipments through Hamburg port are quite regular. If such radioactive materials catch fire they can be highly dangerous. It had docked in Liverpool on its way to Hamburg.

NFLA commissioned independent marine environment consultant Tim Deere-Jones to produce a NFLA Policy Briefing on the incident and wider concerns over the transport of such materials. This outlined some real concerns that certain types of shipments may not have an adequate level of international safety and emergency planning arrangements around them. (2)

This report was shared with the UK and Irish Governments, Devolved Governments in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and the UK Parliament's Transport Select Committee. The NFLA Chair and NFLA Secretary and Tim Deere-Jones also met with the Secretary General and staff of the International Maritime Organisation and with representatives of the RMT trade union.

The final accident report published this week by the German Government notes and tallies with a number of the issues and concerns highlighted in the NFLA Policy Briefing. (3)

On his consideration and review of the German report, Tim Deere-Jones notes:

- The report confirms serious flaws in the inspection of vital safety components of the *Atlantic Cartier's* electrical wiring system and carbon dioxide fire fighting systems.
- The report confirms weaknesses in cargo manifests for a number of the dangerous goods consignments (including all of the radioactivity consignments). The NFLA drew attention to the poor rating of the *Atlantic Cartier's* safety inspection record (20 deficiencies reported over the five years prior to the fire) in its Policy Briefing and noted that those deficiencies covered categories including "fire prevention" (twice over the five years), International Safety Management (twice over five years), "certification and documentation" and "documentation of compliance with dangerous goods legislation".
- The report confirms that the *Atlantic Cartier* has been suffering significant hull/design flaws (necessitating ongoing daily repairs) ever since its entry into service. Despite these basic flaws, the

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vessel was lengthened two years after her “entry”, and these design flaws appear to have worsened as a result. Tim Deere-Jones is deeply concerned that such a vessel has been permitted to carry large cargoes including a mixture of propellants, explosives, munitions, flammable materials and radioactive materials throughout crowded European sea lanes and into complex European ports.

- Tim Deere-Jones notes that the issue of removing dangerous cargo from the *Atlantic Cartier* was problematical due to the absence of personnel (due to a public holiday) who could operate the relevant dockside machinery.

NFLA is alarmed by the comments made by Tim Deere-Jones and shares his view that all European national and supra-national maritime authorities need to urgently address the issue of removing dangerous cargo from vessels at sea, an operation likely to present far greater problems than offloading while at the dockside. NFLA also urge these authorities to consider developing detailed emergency plans for the at sea, off-loading, of dangerous goods consignments from vessels in difficulty on the high seas. NFLA also sees the ongoing reduction of emergency towing vessels around UK waters as a major concern in the event of an accident involving such a shipment.

NFLA Chair Councillor Norman McDonald said:

“I welcome the publication by German maritime authorities of its report on the *Atlantic Cartier* fire. It is clear that this serious incident, as noted in the accident report, outlines the need for a rapid improvement in emergency planning around such vessels transporting radioactive materials and other dangerous goods across Europe and further afield. This is a wake-up call for the nuclear industry and the shipping industry. A major accident was narrowly averted in Hamburg, which could easily have occurred in any UK or Irish shipping port, or more dangerously on the open seas. I will be writing to the UK, Irish and Devolved Governments calling on a full response to this accident report and will bring it to the attention of the UK Parliament’s Transport Select Committee. I will also be noting the urgent need to restore emergency towing vessels around the British Isles. Changes need to take place before a significant and dangerous accident occurs at a port or on the open seas.”

Ends

For more information please contact Sean Morris, NFLA Secretary on 0161 234 3244 or 07771 930196 or Tim Deere-Jones can be contacted on 01834 871011.

Notes for editors:

- (1) Safety4Sea.com, 19th October 2015 <http://www.safety4sea.com/bsu-issues-report-re-fire-onboard-atlantic-cartier-in-the-port-of-hamburg-25196>
- (2) NFLA Policy Briefing 120, ‘Concerns over the transportation of nuclear materials by sea on ‘Roll on, Roll Off’ vessels, the *Atlantic Cartier* fire emergency and wider issues for UK / Irish ports’, 4th March 2014
[http://www.nuclearpolicy.info/docs/briefings/A234_\(NB120\)_Marine_nuclear_transportation.pdf](http://www.nuclearpolicy.info/docs/briefings/A234_(NB120)_Marine_nuclear_transportation.pdf)
- (3) BSU (German Federal Bureau of Maritime Casualty Investigation) report on the *Atlantic Cartier* fire accident, published 9th October 2015
http://www.safety4sea.com/images/media/2015/BSU_-_Fire_onboard_Atlantic_Cartier_2015_10.pdf

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS IN REPORT AS NOTED BY TIM DEERE-JONES:

1. No cause of fire identified: No blame attributed.

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2. Vessel's CO2 fire extinguishing system defective (**a leak in control room when deployed**): **defective inspection: multi lingual and out of date documentation.**
3. Cargo manifests and dangerous goods lists defective: **inconsistencies noticed in respect of volumes/weights/quantities of dangerous goods consignments (including radioactive cargo).** The report stated that **"Due to the high risk potential of such goods... (the) ship's command and shore based authorities must have reliable data on quantities from the outset."**
4. Damage to vessel's electrical wiring system: "traces of exposure to external heat on cables in the vicinity of welded joints are a clear indication of corresponding failings" (attributed to historical repair welding damage (see para 5 below). Electrical wiring system inspection defective: did not note/record cable issues
5. Vessel had significant structural problems: "structural flaws of the *Atlantic Cartier*" have resulted in repair welding operations becoming "part of everyday life on board for almost 30 years". In addition: "Operation of the *Atlantic Cartier* has involved continuous crack formation and the ensuing need for flammable welding repair work on an ongoing basis since her entry into service, and in particular, since she was lengthened 2 years later"
- 6: The report noted that the fire on board *Atlantic Cartier* occurred during a public holiday (May Day) and that "valuable time passed" before Port and Terminal authorities could gather personnel and equipment to remove the dangerous goods cargo from the ship.