

Another major shipyard accident

sBurnt worker is 23rd person to be killed or injured this month

BY TEH, JOO LIN

A WORKER was badly burnt yesterday during a fire onboard a boat in a Tuas shipyard, the second major accident at the same facility in the last 10 days.

The 54-year-old man, believed to be the ship's engineer and a New Zealander, also became the 23rd person either injured or killed in shipyard accidents this month.

He was rushed to hospital where he was warded with second-degree burns. He was said to be in a stable condition.

The blaze was the second accident since June 17 at Drydocks World Singapore — part of an international ship-repair firm — and the latest in a rash of accidents that have rocked the shipping industry.

This month, shipyard accidents have claimed the lives of five workers and injured 18 others.

That tally includes two workers who recently died after being badly burnt in an explosion earlier this month.

Yesterday's fire came just a week after safety officials urged shipyards to call an unprecedented "time-out" from work to review safety procedures. So far, at least 26 out of the 89 shipyards here have responded to the call.

Drydocks was said to have conducted a time-out last Friday. The fire yester

day happened onboard the Pacific Sentinel, a supply vessel that docked at the Drydocks yard earlier in the week, according to workers there.

The blaze apparently began in a compartment near the engine room. The Straits Times understands the engineer was doing repair work there.

At the same shipyard last Tuesday, two Indian nationals died and five others were injured while working below deck on another ship. It appeared to be a case of gas poisoning.

A Manpower Ministry spokesman said all work at Drydocks had been stopped.

In a separate accident on Sunday in Pasir Panjang, four crewmen onboard a container vessel were scalded by steam and hot water.

The run of deaths and injuries comes at a time when the shipping sector is enjoying a boom in business.

Last year, the marine and offshore industry — largely the ship-repair and offshore sectors — rang in \$13.05 billion in total output — a 33 per cent jump from 2006.

Madam Halimah Yacob, a member of the Government Parliamentary Committee for Manpower, said the flurry of work creates tight deadlines, but worker safety should be the top priority.

"Workers must internalise the safety ethos and be conscious of safety all the time... or complacency can set in. That is when it becomes very dangerous."

Meanwhile, inspectors this week began checks which focus on the safety protocols at shipyards.

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ADDITIONAL REPORTING
BY JERMYN CHOW



ST PHOTO FRANCIS ONG

ACCIDENT SCENE: The 54-year-old man was doing repair work below deck on this ship when a fire broke out. He was hospitalised with second-degree burns.



ST FILE PHOTO

DEADLY BLAST: An explosion on the Rainbow Star on June 8 killed three and injured 12.

3 weeks, 4 accidents, 5 dead

Accident 1: Explosion on the Rainbow Star

When: June 8
 Where: Kreuz Shipbuilding & Engineering in Tuas Crescent
 Toll: Three dead from burns, 12 others hurt

Accident 3: Scalding on the MSC ESTHI

When: June 22
 Where: Pasir Panjang
 Toll: Four crewmen scalded by steam and hot water on the container ship

Accident 2: Suspected gas poisoning on the Pacific Ataawhai

When: June 17
 Where: DryDocks World Singapore in Tuas Crescent
 Toll: Two dead, believed to be from suffocation, and another five hurt

Accident 4: Fire on the Pacific Sentinel

When: June 25
 Where: DryDocks World Singapore
 Toll: One worker with second-degree burns

**Four workers hurt in accident;
many flee from nearby
buildings on seeing fireball.
Power cuts lasted up to 15 mins**

BY SUJIN THOMAS &
AA/IELIA TAN

AN EXPLOSION sent a fireball bursting into the sky above a downtown building operated by a Singapore Power subsidiary yesterday morning, sparking blackouts along Orchard Road.

The fire happened at around 10am, when contractors were working on an electrical substation in the three-storey building on Somerset Road.

One worker, a 34-year-old man, suffered second-degree burns on his back and right hand, while three others had inhaled smoke, said the Singapore Civil Defence Force. They were taken to the Singapore General Hospital and have been warded.

The blast shocked office workers in the bustling district, many of whom fled from the surrounding buildings.

"A ball of fire about 1m high shot out from the building and I felt vibrations," said a 19-year-old administrative assistant who wanted to be known only as Ms Tan. She was working next door to the affected building and shouted "explosion" to warn her co-workers.

The substation in the Somerset Road building, which is operated by SP PowerGrid, controlled power lines.

Blackouts ranging from a few seconds to 15 minutes were reported in nearby buildings on Orchard Road, such as The Heeren and the Meritus Mandarin Hotel.

Some traffic lights were also down for about 10 minutes, said witnesses.

An SMRT spokesman told The Straits Times that several 1VIRT stations near the area had lost power, but back-up generators immediately kicked in and there were no train delays.

The explosion also caused an exodus of about 500 office workers from an adjoining 17-storey office building, called 111 Somerset Road.

Many fled the building after hearing a loud boom, while others were ushered out by fire wardens. The building was unscathed.

"We were in the middle of a meeting when we heard a loud bang and the power then shut off," said 29-year-old engineering consultant Mic Phua.

Many witnesses also said that they saw tufts of white smoke wafting upwards from the three-storey building.

In a press statement, Singapore Power said that the power supply was fully restored by 10.25am and the company was investigating the cause of the fire.

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