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AT WORK

A SELECTION OF DIFFERENT EXAMPLES FROM THE EVERYDAY EXPERIENCE OF BOSKALIS | NUMBER 1 / 2017

MY IDEA OF SAFETY? WARNING PEOPLE IF THEY ARE NOT SAFE



“Always remain alert”, says Salvage Master Wytse Huismans on the subject of working safely. He is just back from Liverpool, England, where he worked with a marine chemist and a contractor as a consultant in the operation to put a fire out on a ship. Wooden pallets had caught fire in one of the holds and carbon monoxide had been detected in the neighboring engine room. First operation: save an engineer.

“The man had gone into the engine room unprotected during the inspection, without telling anyone. So you have to stay sharp because some people ‘switch off’ in situations like that. That’s partly because they don’t know the risks as well as we do, and partly because they follow orders from officers who are not sufficiently aware of

what they are sending the crew towards. They also don’t have enough experience with rescue equipment. We took an engineer with us to show us a few things. When we checked to see if his compressed air bottle was hanging correctly, it turned out that it was upside down and his mask was leaking a lot of air. He was someone we gave an emergency training session to on the spot.”

While you take care of each other’s safety as a team, you must never forget about yourself. Wytse: “We went looking for a gas leak because the carbon monoxide levels were a lot higher than initially thought. Fortunately, we found it very quickly and were able to safely handle the job between the three of us. If it had taken longer, we would have had to upscale the

| Wytse Huismans

operation. There is one simple thought that goes through your mind when you are facing this decision: if something happens, who’s going to rescue me? In high-risk situations, you need to know you can fall back on your own people.

We got the situation under control with the help of the onshore fire service. What I notice then is that rules are sometimes a hindrance to safety. When there was only one rafter left with a smoldering piece of wood, the discussion on how to tackle this problem lasted an entire day. That’s what I call mindless safety: checking off lists purely to follow the rules. That’s not what my safety is about. My safety is about warning people if they are not safe and ensuring that everyone gets home again safe and sound.”