

Engine-damage claims have yet to materialise

September 15th, 2010 19:58 GMT by Jim Mulrenan Zurich

Slow steaming and low-sulphur fuels were on the agenda at the IUMI conference as forward-thinking underwriters anticipated they might well be facing a spate of engine-damage claims by now.

Fortunately the claims have not materialised, at least so far, but underwriters remain concerned as machinery damage remains as big and costly an issue as ever.

Underwriters attending the Zurich conference cited only a single low-sulphur fuel-related claim and that involved a generator rather than a main engine on an AP Moller-Maersk vessel.

Despite the fears, nothing abnormal had been found as main engines were powered down to 40% and then to 10% of output, with the picture on low-sulphur fuel much the same, although scoring of moving parts by catalytic fines that are harder than the metal of pistons and cylinder liners remains a cause for concern.

But the experience has been mainly with modern two-stroke diesels where the owners have followed manufacturer's guidance and made modifications such as retrofitting slide-type fuel valves and installing gate valves to cut out excess turbocharger capacity.

CMA CGM vice-president Ludovic Gerard said many running hours had been clocked up operating large bore two-strokes at super slow steaming speeds and the experience with the company's containership fleet had been satisfactory.

Gerard said super slow steaming was "not something to be afraid of" but was sustainable and would continue in the future.

But if recent developments in engine operation are not causing too much of a headache, there is concern that managing the bunkers and fuel-handling and preparation equipment is getting more complex and adding to the possibility of crew error or negligence.

The high level of machinery damage in general also remains an ongoing concern.

London underwriter Peter McIntosh who chair's IUMI's ocean hull committee warned that machinery damage accounted for about 35% of all claims by numbers between 1995 and 2005, as compared to groundings and collisions, which each produced about 20% of claims.

McIntosh said the Lloyd's of London market alone had paid out \$100m of machinery claims, each averaging about \$100,000, with the figure little changed over the past 15 years.

And bigger ships mean the potential for large engine-damage claims could grow.

The conference was told that the 2,300-tonne engine of the 13,500-teu mega containership *Emma Maersk* (built 2006) alone cost \$17m.

But sometimes it appears that not a lot can be done to overcome what appears to be stupidity.

Gerry Williams, the chief European hull and machinery surveyor for BMT Marine & Offshore, told the conference of a \$21m claim that resulted from the flooding of an engine room.

The cause? The crew had used a paint can lid to blank off a 300 mm pipe holding back a seven-metre head of seawater.

An even more costly claim involved an LNG carrier's 48,000-bhp steam plant, where the covers were left off the main condenser with an ingress of seawater again the result. The cost of this claim is estimated at \$37.5m.

Williams also indicated that he was seeing damage from vessels literally bumping into each other at congested anchorages.