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CAPTAIN'S LOG: WORST CASE SCENARIO]

By Teresa Drugatz

No Seal

IT WAS A WEEK BEFORE EASTER WHEN M/Y *RAINY DAY* pulled in to dock at Malé, Maldives, to meet their holiday charter. The crew planned to do last-minute prep and provisioning before their guests arrived four days later. Despite the prep time involved, they were looking forward to the world-famous diving and hoped to take in the pristine sights, making the most of the little downtime allotted to them. They planned to explore the archipelago, visit the National Museum, Hukuru Miskiiy (Old Friday Mosque) and make time for some fun in the sun. Most importantly, they were looking forward to getting to know their newest crewmember, Chief Engineer Tony, outside of their work environment.

Just as *Rainy Day* was making its way to the harbor, Chief Engineer Tony went down to the engine room for a final check before docking. He made a mental note of the engine's oil levels, checked the generators and made sure the machinery was cooling properly. With his recent arrival, he was trying his best to familiarize himself with the engine room as quickly as possible. As he made his usual rounds, he noticed an ever-so-slight leak coming from the port side shaft seal. He examined it to see if there was any visible damage before creating a "bandage" of rags to curtail the leak.

Upon docking, he informed the captain of the situation, and the two worked diligently to devise a solution. Given their remote location, they knew their resources were limited, plus their tool supply had been unknowingly depleted by the last chief, who left with plenty of ill will — this on top of trying to locate any information about the seal in the engine logs or records in order to source a replacement. When they finally discovered the manufacturer and serial number, they scrambled online to buy them, only to learn the company had gone out of business. With time running out, they reluctantly decided to "doctor" the seal so they could accommodate the charter. Chief Engineer Tony monitored the temporary repair until the guests arrived, and all seemed in good standing.

The vessel departed and started making its way around the island to the Rasdhoo Atoll where they were to stop for a snorkeling excursion. It wasn't long before Tony noticed their repair had taken a turn for the worse and the seal suddenly began leaking a tremendous amount of water. Although the chief tried, he knew his rag bandage wouldn't control it. Notifying the captain, the yacht quickly turned back towards Malé; however, in the haste and in largely unfamiliar sea, the vessel ran aground on a sand bank, rendering *Rainy Day* immobile until they were able to be towed off and back to the dock. The grounding prevented further flooding, but the sudden stop caused minor injuries to the guests and crew. Fortunately, they were able to be shuttled back to shore, albeit with a dismal and frightful experience to begin (and end) the charter, but that's another story.

Chief Engineer Tony was embarrassed and was at a loss for explanations why the seal failed, but coming aboard and not doing a thorough check of the equipment didn't help any. Hindsight is 20/20, but as the saying goes, "know your vessel."

"A vital, but often overlooked, part of maintenance is record keeping," says Rich Merhige, president of Advanced Mechanical Enterprises (AME), a south Florida-based marine engineering services firm. "A detailed ship's log is critical to preventative maintenance. It's a very basic, and obviously, cost

effective way to track when mechanical components are installed and serviced. The ideal chief engineer is extremely detail orientated, and will include makes, models, manufacturers, serial numbers, and have a list of important measurements organized and readily available. The information should also be updated regularly and when anything changes, also notating the date the update was made."

Tony had a fairly short period of time to get acquainted with the machinery. Discovering the missing tools was an indication the engine room wasn't in complete readiness. In the effort to identify the shaft seal, it also was frustrating to find that drawings, pictures and other applicable records regarding equipment in the engine room were lacking; there was no file on the seals.

"Prepare for the worst, hope for the best," says a former engineer of an Oceanfast 130. "Always carry spare parts when possible. Spare seals are small and easy to store, so there's no reason why there shouldn't be extras on board. If carrying spares isn't feasible, service kits, or manufacturers' recommended repair accessories should be kept on hand. It's also important to have good relationships with the contractors who may help you with maintenance. They can provide guidance or support remotely, and are more inclined to do so if they know and like you."

The captain had a previous connection with AME and made a desperate call for help. It was discovered that the seals on *Rainy Day* were no longer in production, which could explain why there was no spare on board.

"We are authorized distributors for Wärtsilä seals and bearings, which sells a variety of service kits for their seals," said Merhige. "They incorporate items vital to servicing and repairing the seals and can include a face, seat, sealing strips, o-cord, bellows, inflatable seals, gaskets, splash guard, and splash guard clamps. We often get called in to replace discontinued or damaged seals with Wärtsilä seals. If the existing seal is of another brand and is not exactly compatible, we engineer a conversion," explained Merhige. "We work closely with the crew and consult with Wärtsilä engineers to ensure the fit is exact. If necessary, we design and machine adapter plates in our machine shop to aid in the installation."

The saying: "If you fail to plan, you plan to fail" rang true in the case of *Rainy Day*, and although coming aboard at short notice may have put Chief Engineer Tony in a difficult situation, he learned a valuable lesson. "Always do your due diligence when it comes to maintenance and record keeping," adds Merhige. "Explore all of your options by contacting qualified professionals, and never, ever tempt fate by not having a plan B in place." **DW**

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