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ESSENTIAL GUIDELINES TO TANDEM TOWAGE

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Tandem tow may be defined as the operation of towing two or more tows in series with one tow wire from a single tugboat, the second and subsequent tows being connected to the stern of the tow ahead.

Although tandem tows does save substantial cost or expenses compared to a single tow, more often than not, most people are quite ignorant of the grave risks involved during the ordinary sea conveyance. Easy as it may seem, rest assured that it is far more complicated.

Barges and dead vessels are much more difficult to control in the event of bad weather, loss of tug power, or other foreseeable or unforeseeable circumstances. There were a number of unfortunate incidents in the past whereby towed vessels had collided with each other resulting in severe loss and/or damage. Insurers in the London market represented by the former Salvage Association are usually **NOT** in favour of approving tandem tows.

Furthermore, due to commercial reasons, a number of barges and tugboats are not properly or adequately maintained to satisfy international safety or class standards. Improper repairs and/or replacement would only exacerbate the above risks.

2.0 RISK / EMERGENCIES AND PROACTIVE GUIDELINES

Aside from the common perils of the sea during a voyage, the presence of a Tow might cause additional problems. To date, we understand that there are no hard and fast rules that can be laid down on how to deal with any particular situation in case of an emergency or incident. Good seamanship, correct judgment, quick thinking and preparation (including plan B) by the master and crew as well as those onboard would obviously be the best course of action. However, the following guidelines may be useful:-.

2.1 ENGINE BREAKDOWN

When a Tugboat's engine(s) halts unexpectedly, the Tow is likely to continue moving through the water longer than the Tug. The likely danger to arise is the Tug being run down by her Tow. If the Tug's course is altered sharply away from the course of the Tow, using the remaining momentum of the Tug, there is a possibility that direct collision may be avoided.

In any event, as soon as necessary avoiding collision actions have been taken, the Gob Rope must be shortened immediately, so that the tow rope leads directly over the stern.

In shallow water, both Tug and Tow may become 'anchored' by the tow line resting on the sea bed. As long as they are considered 'anchored' and not moving over the ground no harm will be done.

2.2 EMERGENCY STOP

Tug and tow are more often than not hampered in their ability to manoeuvre. Always allow plenty of time to avoid close-quarter situations.

In the event of an emergency stop either deliberate or otherwise, all necessary measures are required to protect the Tug first and allow the Tows to pass either side thus avoiding a collision.

When it is necessary to stop the Tow suddenly, the quickest way to do so is to turn it round in a tight circle, by towing at right angles to its course. Care needs to be taken during such a manoeuvre to prevent the Tug being girded, but most of the momentum can be taken off the Tow very quickly this way.

2.3 TOWLINE BREAKS OR PARTS

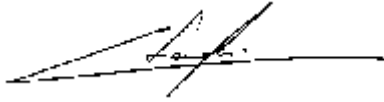
If a towline parts or breaks, it will be very unlikely or impossible to reconnect at sea. Therefore, the exercise of **good seamanship** is emphasized and like the saying goes 'Prevention is Better Than Cure'.

2.4 SINKING OF THE TOW

All necessary measure has to be taken to reduce the risk of a Tow from sinking, but when everything else has failed, the sinking Tow should fully release before it actually sinks. If this is not possible by any means at all (including cutting the tow line, letting go the winch etc..) then the tow line **MUST** be secured firmly in position so that it leads directly over the stern of the Tug, on the centre line. The Gob Rope should be used to do this, and if possible, additional lashings placed to secure the line in this position. If the tow line is properly secured on the centre line, the tow line will break long before the sinking ship can pull the Tug down with it. If, however, the tow line is allowed to come over the side of the Tug, there is a very real danger that the Tug will be rolled over.

3.0 SUMMARY

In short, tandem towing operations possess a greater degree of hazard compared to single Tug & Tow operations where emergency towing pennant can be easily recovered (diagram attached below).



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P.S: We welcome any comments or suggestion with regard to the above article. Kindly e-mail to the writer at raj@cjamarine.com

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TYPICAL EMERGENCY TOWING ARRANGEMENTS

