

1991, November 5

Off the English coast, 10 n.m. east of Teeside, England

Sodium chlorate (Class 5) 40 one-tonne bags stowed in two freight containers; solid powerful oxidiser that decomposes by heat to free oxygen and may cause fire and explosion in contact with combustibles

Summary: The Swedish ro-ro ferry **Stora Korsnäs Link I** was on a voyage from Sweden to Hartlepool in England when a **fire** started in the machine room. Attempts were made to extinguish the fire by filling the machine room with **CO₂**, but the attempts failed and the crew was forced to shut down the engines. The ship's crew alerted the authorities of the nearest port Teeside and requested help. Rescue vessels were sent to the scene and rescue personnel boarded the ship. Two tugs from a local salvage company arrived and towed the vessel further out to sea. The fire had now spread to the upper deck and the rescue personnel were unable to settle the fire. Eight hours later, the salvage company had contacted the owner of the cargo and found out that the ship did not only carry different forest products but also potentially explosive chemicals. On the lower deck 40 tonnes of **sodium chlorate** was stowed within two containers. When this was found out the ship was quickly abandoned. A one-mile **exclusion zone** was established and the salvage tugs left the scene. However, after sometime a decision was taken to make a new attempt to save the cargo and a vessel with firefighting equipment was sent to the scene. Water was pumped onto the exterior of the ship in order to achieve control of the fire. The attempt was unsuccessful and the fire spread to the other cargo decks during the following days. On November 8, an **explosion** occurred close to the containers with sodium chlorate and it blew out the side of the ship causing the ship to roll over and capsize. After a few hours the ship sank at a depth of 40 metres. The explosion caused no injuries but blew out two windows on the firefighting vessel.

Cause of Accident: A fire in the machine room which spread to the cargo decks.

Comments on Response: The cargo manifest did not have the proper information and this led to a very dangerous situation as the rescue personnel boarded the vessel and tried to fight the fire unaware of the explosion risk. The second attempt to settle the fire was very unwise and fortunately nobody was injured.

Source of Information: 1) "Gap in the paper chain", Hazardous Cargo Bulletin, January 1992. 2) Report S 1992:5, Swedish Board of Accident Investigation. (Abstracted July 2001 by Edvard Molitor, Swedish Coast Guard HQ)