



FIRE IN THE ENGINE ROOM!

As any seafarer who has experienced it will undoubtedly agree, a fire at sea is a frightening experience. The fire brigade may be thousands of miles away! The most common ship fire is in the engine room, and the usual cause is oil leaking from pipes under high pressure, specifically from the fuel pump discharge.

When a high-pressure fuel line fractures or a gland leaks fuel oil is released as a fine spray that will readily ignite upon contact with a hot surface such as the engine exhaust. The resulting blaze is immediately fierce, and being constantly fed with fuel from the high-pressure line, will rapidly become impossible to fight with extinguishers and hoses. It will probably be necessary to evacuate the engine room within a very few minutes, and use the remote stops to stop the pump and shut-off the fuel supply. Damage will be severe, with a high risk of loss of life, and the ship may well be lost.



Because of the high risk and severe consequences from high-pressure oil line leaks the fuel oil pump discharge lines are double skinned so that any fuel leaks are contained and the leakages safely drained to a tank. The integrity of the outer skin is essential to prevent any leaking oil from spraying over a hot surface and the consequent fire.

DO regularly check the fuel oil drain tank and ensure the alarm is functioning to ensure that any leakage from the inner pipe is detected.

DO ensure that the outer protective skin of fuel oil pump discharge lines is frequently checked and immediately renewed if any damage or deterioration is found. The photographs above show examples of double-skinned high-pressure lines that need to be renewed.

DO confirm that the remote stops and quick-closing valve mechanisms work by regular testing – and that ship's staff know where they are and how to use them.