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English Channel collision tanker being towed by tug



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Pictures from the French navy show the stricken tanker at sea

A chemical tanker which collided with a cargo ship off France's Brittany coast overnight is being towed to the French port of Brest.

A French salvage team boarded the YM Uranus and a tug boat was attached at 1100 French time (0900 GMT), the ship's operator told BBC News.

None of the 6,000 tonne cargo of heavy pygas gasoline escaped, V Ships said.

The tanker took on water after the collision close to the mouth of the English Channel.

Its crew were winched to safety by a French helicopter and no-one was injured.

It was said earlier to be listing badly to port after its collision with the Panamanian-flagged Hanjin Rizhao, 50 nautical miles (100km) south-west of the French island of Ouessant.

The Channel is one of the world's busiest shipping lanes, with more than 400 vessels using it daily, and collisions continue to happen despite use of a radar-controlled traffic separation system.

Heavy pygas (pyrolysis gasoline) is a product of ethylene manufacturing and contains a large amount of the industrial solvent benzene.

'Favourable situation'

Aude Flambard, a press officer at France's Atlantic Maritime Prefecture in Brest, confirmed to the BBC News website that the YM Uranus was under tow, and was not expected to reach port until the evening



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low, and was not expected to reach port until the evening.

She said the Hanjin Rizhao (initially identified by officials as the Hanjin Richzad) had proceeded on its way because it had not been damaged in the collision.

Travelling from Porto Marghera in Italy to Amsterdam in the Netherlands, the YM Uranus collided with the Hanjin Rizhao in darkness, France's AFP news agency reports.

The Hanjin Rizhao had been travelling between Las Palmas in Spain and Rotterdam in the Netherlands, reportedly with a cargo of steel.

V Ships spokesman Pat Adamson told the BBC News website that the YM Uranus had been struck on the stern by the other, much larger ship.

No heavy pygas had escaped, he said, adding that while the gasoline was flammable, it would quickly evaporate in the event of a spill.

The 13-strong crew of the YM Uranus took to liferafts at around 0330 GMT, from which they were winched to safety by a French helicopter and taken to a military base south of Brest.

Maritime officials quoted by AFP said the ship had taken in "large amounts of water".

The French coastguard said later that they had started to pump water out, and no pollution was visible.

"We're in more of a favourable situation than an unfavourable one," maritime authority spokesman Marc Gander told journalists in Brest.

He estimated it would take the tug, the ETV Abeilles Bourbon, between 12 and 13 hours to tow the tanker to port.

The vessel had a 12-degree list to port but it was in a "stable condition" and there was no immediate danger, Mr Adamson said.

"The ingress of water has now been contained," he added.



We're in more of a favourable situation than an unfavourable one"

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'No imminent threat'

Peter Bullard from Falmouth Coastguard in the UK said no pollution had been reported.

"There's certainly no imminent threat," he told BBC Radio Cornwall.

"It'd be foolish of me to say that pollution would never reach us but there's certainly no imminent threat. And that's not our concern at the moment."

Mr Bullard said the UK Coastguard's role at this stage was chiefly to assist their French colleagues.

"But obviously, the environment is of interest to all of us whether it's the French coast or ours," he added.



It'd be foolish of me to say that pollution would never reach us but there's certainly no imminent threat"

Peter Bullard

Falmouth Coastguard

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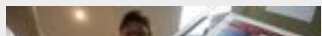
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