

Perintis

Maritime Chemical Accident

1989, March 13

English Channel, 35 n.m. south-east of Brixham, UK

Lindane (Class 6) in a freight container; extremely toxic solid pesticide, TLV 0.5 mg/m³ (USA), IDLH 1.000 mg/m³ (USA); **marine pollutant**
Permethrine (Class 6) and **Cypermethrine** (Class 6), both toxic solid pesticides

Summary: The Panamanian registered, Indonesian owned container ship **Perintis** capsized and sank on March 13, 1989, due to hard weather. The ship was en route from Antwerp to Indonesia and had reached the middle of the English Channel. In its cargo were 6 tonnes of the extremely toxic pesticide **lindane** and 1 tonne each of **permethrine** and **cypermethrine**, pesticides that are both toxic to the marine biota. The lindane was carried in 116 drums stowed in a freight container placed on deck. The other two substances were kept in a total of 32 drums in the hold of the ship. After all crew members had been rescued, the search started for the cargo manifest which revealed the presence of pesticides in the cargo. As several containers had been spotted **floating away** from the scene, a massive search started for the containers and drums with pesticides. Fishing was banned in the immediate area of the ship. The lindane container was found on March 15 and a French tug towed the container towards Cherbourg. During the following night the container was reported lost from the tug and sunk in an unknown position. The container remained unfound despite an extensive search. For a long period tests were done on water and fish in the area but they showed no evidence of pollution. It was decided that due to the **low solubility** of lindane, it was safe to leave it on the seabed. As for the other two pesticides, 28 of the 32 drums were located and taken care of after an extensive search in an area around the wreck and in an area closer to the position where the ship first capsized. The search for the last four drums was called off as the substances showed a very low solubility in sea water, which meant they would not pollute a large area in case of a leak from the drums.

Cause of Accident: The ship capsized and sank due to hard weather.

Comments on Response: The search operations were successful as regards the drums of permethrine and cypermethrine. Most of these drums were found. Regarding the lindane container it might be questioned whether it was a wise decision to tow such a highly dangerous cargo. It was lost during the towage and not found again. The overall co-operation between UK and French response units was successful.

Source of Information: The Perintis Incident, Report from the Department of Transport, UK, 1992.
(Abstracted July 2001 by Edvard Molitor, Swedish Coast Guard HQ)