

Belfast Harbour death: Union rep says he tried to inspect ship but was turned away

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19:09, 22 FEB 2023 UPDATED 11:03, 23 FEB 2023

Marine Accident Investigation Branch say they have "deployed inspectors to Belfast to commence a preliminary assessment into a man overboard"



Jim McVeigh at the BG Ruby in Belfast in December

A union rep tried to inspect a ship that is now at the centre of a fatal incident investigation but was turned away, it is claimed.

Belfast Harbour Police are investigating "an accident" that occurred in the [port](#) on Monday night, but have released few details.

The man who died was a crew member on the BG Ruby, a cargo ship operated by Rotterdam-based BG Freight.

Jim McVeigh, an inspector for the International Transport Workers Federation, said he boarded the vessel when it was in Belfast on December 8, but was refused an opportunity to inspect the vessel and speak to its crew.

ITF inspectors, Mr McVeigh says, board vessels in ports to check on issues like crew welfare and health and safety issues.

Regarding his assertion that he attempted to inspect the BG Ruby in December, he told Belfast Live: "We board ships worldwide and try to ensure that the seafarers on board are being paid and looked after and are safe. As an industry it is not very unionised and often the crew on these ships, who are from places like the Philippines, Russia, Romania, do not feel they can raise any issues except when we come on board.

"On December 8, I visited this ship at Belfast Port but I was refused a request to inspect it or speak to the crew. I was on board briefly and spoke to the captain but I was not allowed to carry out my inspection.

"Unfortunately, it is not the first time we have been refused permission to inspect a ship owned by BG Freight. I cannot say what has happened in this tragic incident in Belfast and clearly there will have to be a full investigation."

Mr McVeigh said that "there is a wider issue about the welfare of crews of cargo ships who can be at sea for months at a time and are very vulnerable to exploitation".

He added that ITF rep's speaking to seafarers "is often the only way they can raise any concerns they have".

Regarding the Belfast Harbour situation, he added: "Given this vessel is in Belfast I am calling for a meeting with Belfast Harbour Commissioners to tell them they have a responsibility to speak up with regard to allowing us on board this and other ships to do our job."

BG Freight runs 15 vessels in and around 29 ports in the UK, Ireland and continental Europe.

A spokesman for the Belfast Harbour Police said they "can confirm they are investigating an accident which took place in the Port on Monday night (20th February), involving the fatality of a crew member of a container vessel berthed at Victoria Terminal 3".

They added: "This is an ongoing investigation and no further details can be released at this stage."

A spokesperson for the Marine Accident Investigation Branch said: "The MAIB has deployed inspectors to Belfast to commence a preliminary assessment into a man overboard from the Portuguese registered container vessel BG Ruby while loading cargo alongside in Belfast. The MAIB team are in contact with the Portuguese Accident Investigation Bureau Maritime regarding this incident ."

The Northern Ireland Health and Safety Executive said they "are not involved in this investigation and therefore cannot make any further comment".