

LONDON BRANCH

Watchkeeping standards – do navigation audits help?

➔ Another large audience gathered on board HQS *Wellington* recently for the latest joint meeting organised by the London branch. A panel of speakers chaired by Cdre David Squire FNI spoke on the issue, following which the debate was open to the floor.

Carl Durow, Loss Prevention Manager from the London Club, presented a case study of a small container vessel fleet entered in the Club. There had been several relatively small collisions/navigation incidents, but these were increasing, causing concern both in the Club and with the owners. To find the root causes, a navigation audit was carried out with an auditor travelling on board for eight days observing two coastal passages and four pilotage operations. General findings showed poor passage planning, particularly under pilotage, where the bridge team over-relied on the pilot; and no routine monitoring of Navtex or Radio/Sat C weather warnings. The auditor took a great deal of time to debrief those on board and the company 'bought into' the procedure. The subsequent claims record from this fleet improved dramatically. Carl concluded by saying navigation audits were successful but noted that they are the beginning of a process, not the finish.

Yusuf Soomro, marine consultant with TMC (Marine) gave a breakdown on how a navigation audit is carried out. He advocated the use of suitably qualified auditors on board for at least two days, preferably three or four, covering sea passage and pilotage; the auditor should observe and blend in, question and not distract the officers, then debrief and discuss findings with the bridge team. The debrief should cover

positive and negative findings, clarify any issues, suggest actions and encourage feedback. Finally, the auditor should prepare a report to the owners with his recommendations.

The final speaker, David Hill, deputy DPA at Shell, gave a brief outline of the Navigation Skills Assessment Programme (NSAP) developed by Shell. Navigating vessels loaded with vast amounts of hydrocarbons around the world is the highest risk activity the company faces, and close engagement with the bridge teams via navigation audits is extremely important. The NSAP reinforces the skills of the bridge team, but also identifies gaps and senior deck officers are individually assessed and debriefed. This moves the safety message from 'assumption' that everything is safe to 'assurance' that the company assets are safe.

Following the presentations, the debate was opened to the audience for questions and comment. One member noted that SMS and bridge procedures were critical, and that there could be no doubt that time spent conducting navigation audits was effort well spent in ensuring procedures were correct. The biggest problem is Shipmasters accepting less than best practices. It is most important that bridge procedures are constantly reinforced. The Master has to be certain that every word of best practices is adhered to. Another member noted that on a recent navigation audit, most procedures were followed, including carrying out drills for failure of critical equipment such as GPS.

Inevitably the discussion moved on to training. One member said that basic training had been reduced because the demand for officers is so great, querying whether today's officers were getting the right supervision in bridge training. Also identified was the shortage of suitably qualified seafarers, which, coupled with the decrease in manning levels, meant

that Masters are being promoted younger and younger, with less experience.

Another surveyor addressed fatigue issues, where ships on minimum manning are operating on the cusp. Navigation audits can identify where this is occurring. Audience members also recognised poor time management as being an issue that can – and should – be identified through a navigation audit.

Motivation is also shown to have an effect on seafarers and their behaviour. What we ask of seafarers is quite rare, and a modern life ashore is more removed from life at sea than in most industries. This led on to discussions on the standards expected on board and the involvement of all ship's staff in the process.

Navigation auditors advocated the use of desktop scenarios using incidents from Official Accident Investigation reports. In particular, they recommended discussing COLREG incidents to make bridge teams aware of how the situation developed. The evening closed with a question on how we measure/assess safety culture – and how we can generate freedom to speak among bridge teams, and promote constant engagement and self assessment.

An auditor noted that it is important to really engage with the bridge team, and only then will you see the benefit of audits. For an audit to be successful takes engagement at all levels; auditor, bridge team and company. 'Buy in' is essential at all levels, both on ship and on shore. For this to happen, people have to be empowered so that they feel part of the team.

In a final show of hands, a vast majority of the audience were in favour of the motion 'Navigation audits help to improve watchkeeping standards'.

Captain Harry Gale FNI

