LONDON BRANCH

Cruise Ships & Passenger Liners – Operational Challenges

➔ A large audience gathered on board *HQS Wellington* for a London Branch Joint Informal Meeting to listen to and debate the operational challenges presented by cruise liners and passenger ships. The panel, chaired by Andrew Bell FNI, Marine Manager at Stephenson Harwood, comprised Capt Dariusz Gozdzik MNI, Staff Captain; Capt Richard Meikle AFNI, ex cruise ship manager; and Stuart Edmonston MNI, Director Loss Prevention, UK P&I Club.

Turnaround

A typical cruise ship may have around 1,000 crew of many different nationalities, divided into departments and sub-departments. It is impossible to have a successful cruise ship operation without a thorough understanding, cooperation and collaboration between these teams and individuals within them.

Dariusz talked of the challenges posed to those on board during a cruise, and in particular in the port where the cruise starts and ends – the 'turnaround'. These include gangway arrangements; traffic flows inside and outside the ship; fuel and water bunkering operations; garbage offload; grey water and sludge offload; stores to take (and the security associated with these operations). Crew must also take into account conflicts with other cruise ship movements; embarkation security screening; baggage x-ray screening; crew joining/leaving; and passengers embarking/disembarking. There will also be official visitors to the ship, onboard PR events to be dealt with, and company senior management may visit for a commercial briefing.

The hotel staff are particularly busy at 'turnaround' with transport, luggage, public health requirements all having to be planned in advance, arrangements promulgated and all involved needing to be thoroughly briefed.

The Chief Engineer and Deputy Captain will have maintenance to carry out and will deal with technical visits and surveys, including Port State Control or flag surveys. The airbridge, gangways and moorings will need constant adjustment depending on wind, tide and current. And then there are the challenges associated with ports where the vessel cannot moor alongside and passengers have to be 'ferried' ashore to quays – which may not be the most suitable landing areas.

Dariusz outlined the challenges of balancing passengers' expectations against the onboard maintenance and stability of the vessel and the constraining factors involved in keeping the ship looking good. Risk assessments, permits to work, port regulations, national and international regulations, environmental constraints, weather factors, ship behaviour, noise, smell, dust and use of chemicals are all challenges to the deck and engine crews.

Maintaining stability on the cruise is a significant challenge requiring constant monitoring, and may even require swimming pools to be emptied.

Owners viewpoint

Richard Meikle looked at the challenges from an owner/manager's viewpoint. Since the 1970s the cruise industry has grown and grown, and there has been no real downturn in this industry – yet. Ships are getting bigger and more cost effective. As the industry grows so the risks increase, with 23.5 million passengers expected to cruise in 2017, 13 new cruise ships on order for 2017 and an average of 3,000 passengers for each.

An owner has to consider what type of vessel they will operate (newbuild or second hand tonnage?) and the target market – luxury, boutique or mass market? The itinerary is critical as this determines the success of the cruise, and determines maximum capacity and profitability. Depending on the itinerary, there are challenges associated with emissions, sewage retention and fuel costs.

Cruise ship operators are risk averse; their assets are mobile and any incidents impact on their reputation with the cost implications of delays. They are particularly concerned with political situations in the proposed itinerary, equipment failures, major accidents such as fire or groundings, health issues such as a norovirus outbreak or a food related incident.

With large and complex vessels with large numbers of passengers, officers and crew, management are constantly evaluating where there are weaknesses. Finally Richard showed videos illustrating the problems associated with heavy rolling due to adverse weather and the difficulty of securing heavy equipment.

Liability

Stuart talked of the legal liability to pay damages or compensation to third parties *for personal injury, illness or death of any passenger, to passengers on board an entered ship arising as a consequence of a casualty to that ship while they are on board, for loss of or damage to the effects of any passenger.*

It is important the Club is notified of any incident that potentially falls within this definition at the earliest opportunity so that it can determine whether or not the incident does indeed fall within Club cover. He noted that most passenger claims involve slips, trips and falls, but other incidents may involve injuries during tendering operations, health issues and ship casualties.

Stuart concluded by showing examples where the vessel was deemed not to be a casualty and so not covered, including one where the ship was capable of safe navigation to its intended destination, albeit at reduced speed, and there was no threat to the life, health or safety of the passengers.

Safety debate

Following the presentations, the debate was open to the floor. Questions on safety culture, emergency response drills, cybersecurity, and vessel size limits were discussed.

The panel agreed it was very easy to talk about safety culture, but very difficult to ascertain how successful it is in the industry. It takes time to develop in a large fleet, and we are much more aware of incidents now through the proliferation of social media.

At what point do we reach a limit on the size of passenger cruise ships? At the moment they are limited by the size of the ports and their facilities, but as ships get larger, port facilities are increasing to match. Only a few years ago, no one imagined that ships would be the size they are now.

It is difficult to be realistic when constructing emergency drill scenarios, as real emergencies can last for days. Developing scenarios to reflect a real emergency takes up a huge amount of time and without real fires, for example, it is difficult to retain the interest of everyone involved. However, full debrief sessions held after the drill and debriefing following a real emergency are the norm.

With interest in cybersecurity coming to the fore, the panel was asked how this is being handled on cruise ships. New ships are built with secure systems in place, equivalent to those found in shore based organisations. However, older ships pose a greater risk and are more vulnerable. Retrofitting these vessels would be very costly.

Following the video shown by Richard, a question was asked on securing the equipment on board. There is a basic level of securing as normal on board a ship, and advanced securing when bad weather is forecast. However, as ships get bigger, ship designers include more furniture in public spaces. For some, such as pianos, scenery panels in theatres, and large plants, there should be bespoke securing systems, but there is no requirement to secure tables and chairs.

The panel was asked to identify the main drivers for improving safety on cruise ships. Are they legislative, P&I Clubs or the cruise lines themselves? There has been a huge progress in safety and the cost in reputational damage is such that owners are continually striving for improvement in safety, putting safety first, and making drills more relevant.

Once again time ran out on the meeting, but many ideas were discussed and the audience left with greater knowledge of the challenges of operating cruise ships and passenger liners.

Harry Gale FNI