

THE ISM CODE AND SSM SYSTEM

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A BRIEF BACKGROUND, ITS IMPLICATIONS AND HOW IT AFFECTS THE WORK OF THE MARINE SURVEYOR

BACKGROUND

During the period 1987 to 1990, P & I Insurance claims and consequently the cost of P & I Insurance rose by an average of more than 200 percent. This came on the back of a series of maritime disasters during that period including the ferry "Herald of Free Enterprise" capsized (Zeebrugge), "Donna Paz" ferry / tanker collision, (Philippines - huge loss of life) and "Scandinavia Star" ferry disaster (Baltic).

After a UK (DOT) funded research into these disasters, the conclusions were taken to the IMO. Thomas Miller, P & I and the House of Lords also filed reports. From these reports it became clear that in a greater percentage of all accidents / disasters, the 'human element' was the major causative factor.

By 1994, the ISM (International Safety Management) code had become law and was incorporated into the SOLAS convention 1974.

ISM IMPLEMENTATION

After the ISM code was incorporated into SOLAS (Safety of Life at Sea) rules in 1994, a period of grace was allowed to give various signatory flag states, ship owners, and managers time to implement the requirements with passenger ships, bulk carriers and tankers being required to be covered by the code since 1998. The ISM code will, by July 2002 encompass all ocean going vessels.

The New Zealand Maritime Safety Authority operating a parallel scheme for smaller vessels, known as Safe Ship Management (SSM) has been in operation since February 1998 and is now mandatory for all New Zealand commercial mechanically-powered vessels.

IMPLICATIONS AND EFFECTS / TRENDS

While Dunsford Marine does not currently undertake audits or conduct compliance inspections for ISM certification, we are called upon increasingly in our various capacities as surveyors to review the onboard ISM systems. More frequently the reviews are undertaken for P & I clubs when completing pre-club entry condition surveys of vessels. A ship's Master is usually forewarned of an impending inspection and should have some idea of what this entails. Although all too frequently we find that the Master is unprepared and a lot of time is wasted while documents are located.

It is very difficult on most ships today, when required to undertake a detailed survey, to have the Masters undivided attention for more than a couple of hours at best. A container vessel or multi-purpose vessel commonly calling at the Port of Auckland today for example, may arrive alongside the berth at say 4.00 pm from deep sea. The vessel may be around 8,000 deadweight tonnes carrying some 600 TEU (containers), with a crew of 11 or 12 and commonly the Master will be keeping a bridge watch at sea and still required to perform all the day to day "paperwork", both at sea and upon arrival in port.

So when I arrive onboard at 5.00pm, after the agent has completed the arrival procedures to say I wish to undertake a P & I condition survey which includes an interview with the Master, he is not usually too impressed. However, with some diplomacy over a cup of coffee, usually we can get down to the "paperwork" without too much further fuss – to leave the Master to later maybe get some sleep while I carry on with the physical inspection of the vessel alone.

The vessel may be sailing at 0600 the next morning and if I find a defect or two, the defects list must be signed by the Master prior to my departure.

This may not be the end for the Master. During the same port call invariably there is more than one surveyor onboard. Quite commonly there will be a class surveyor, port state control surveyor (MSA Inspector) and a cargo surveyor all at the same time and no doubt requiring some of the Master's attention.

I have attended onboard vessels recently where the Master has refused "point blank" to assist, gone to bed and left matters to the Chief Mate.

Under the STCW (Safety Standards on Training, Certification and Watch keeping for Seafarers) regulations he is, no doubt, quite correct. Fine for the surveyor, as long as the mate knows his stuff which certainly is not always the case. The Worldwide trend in ships crews is not only towards reduced numbers, but also use of 3rd world (probably more like 4th world) crews. The Master and Chief Engineer on many ships are commonly of European extraction with the remainder being of some other nationality with very little training outside of sufficient to get the ship from "A" to "B". Meaning for the surveyor, that the majority of what is necessary to complete will be using ones own skills and knowledge gained from experience.

Herein lies a new problem increasingly becoming very real. As ships crews have reduced, training by the once well known shipping companies has also drastically reduced to such an extent that there are less and less qualified personal potentially available for the marine surveying profession. Many shipping companies are having to resort to third world nations for a complete crew simply due to this world wide shortage of the skills-based mariner and in order to compete in the market place of world wide trade. Fine for the "accountants" but makes life very difficult and frustrating for the operation of a ship right down the "chain", to include the surveyor.

Some shipping companies are now reversing the trend by re-introducing cadet training (both deck and engine – Maersk Sealand is a prime example).

We have digressed from ISM however, what I have endeavoured to portray is the immense difficulty there is in complying with well meaning systems. It can be seen how various matters are influencing the trends and how they affect the work of the marine surveyor. We can lead into the parallel SSM scheme from this point.

SSM (SAFE SHIP MANAGEMENT)

By gaining ISO 9001 accreditation in 1998 allowed us as a Company to employ suitably qualified surveyors under Dunsfords name accredited by the MSA to undertake inspections and audits of certain vessels under the New Zealand register, and vessels engaged in charter work and fishing.

The safety surveys traditionally undertaken by the Government Ministry of Transport (MOT) Marine Survey Division are now, since deregulation, undertaken by private commercial companies accredited by the Maritime Safety Authority. For those companies, like Dunsford Marine, it has been a steep learning curve. While calling upon our traditional skills as trained mariners (deck and engine), ship wright / ship builders and naval architects, we have also had to bring about the change in approach to surveying vessels and issuing of certificates of fitness, and audits of the system (including vessels and owners).

Far be it for us to criticise the old system, however from the start we were expected to bring about change in not only our approach to the survey task, ie. inspection of the safety systems, and operation of the vessel, but also to instil the changes required of the crews owners and operators of vessels. The education process has thus been a 'three way street' in effect.

We have seen a marked change in attitude from even the most hardened 'old salt', where in the old survey system, the skipper would only expect to see the Government Surveyor once a year prior to the expiry of his operating certificate, he now has an ongoing 'partnership' arrangement with the survey company. The skipper is obliged to report any incident to both MSA and to the SSM Company for example. We are also expected to undertake an annual audit of each operator, his vessel and the operation to ensure continued compliance.

The Safe Ship Management scheme has also brought under its wing all charter vessel operations, including individual and charter companies.

CONCLUSION

While continuously learning from the experience of change we for one, trust that with all the difficulties confronting us at the 'coal face', that safety is not compromised by an overkill in documentation and the resultant pressures prevailing on the industry and on those that are responsible for its implementation. Both the International ISM code and the local SSM schemes have no doubt brought about renewed awareness towards safety, management of ship operations and a more responsible attitude from the ship owner and ship manager. Certainly in New Zealand the SSM system appears to be having the desired affect with a reduction in accidents as reported in the recent annual review by the Maritime Safety

Authority. Of course the New Zealand maritime scene is on an infinitely smaller scale to the International arena overed by ISM.

Disasters still occur and the potential for maritime calamity is ever-present. Most recently the collision between the reportedly well-found passenger vessel "Norwegian Dream" and equally efficient container vessel, "Ever Decent" in the Northern approaches to the English Channel, while fortunately with no loss of life, has already highlighted factors in shipboard operations. The grounding of the small cruise ship, "World Discoverer" in the Solomons, even more recently, again without loss of life may also tend to emphasise a sinister problem ever present – that of human failure due to a variety of reasons. We, as marine surveyors, will no doubt always have a job as a result of others misfortunes and those of our number prepared for the inevitable changes in both industry demands and technological advances will determine the future survival of our industry as much as anything.

DUNSFORD MARINE LIMITED

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