The Confidential Hazardous Incident Reporting Programme (CHIRP) provides a valuable resource for maritime employees seeking a means to improve practises in the industry or report wrongdoings. “We are interested in the investigation of hazardous occurrences, those that nearly resulted in injury or damage – where an accident was narrowly avoided. It is often referred to as a near-miss,” explains John Rose, the director of the UK-based charitable organisation, adding that hazardous incidents can occur in all aspects of vessel operation, including cargo handling, catering, engineering, navigation, shipboard services, ship/shore interface, etc.

Although the House of Lords Science and Technology Committee proposed a confidential reporting programme for the UK maritime community in 1992, the maritime arm of CHIRP was only established in 2002 (there is a previously established aviation arm). “This was due to a number of public inquiries into major maritime accidents in the UK,” says Rose, adding that the programme was made available to the commercial transport, fishing and leisure communities simultaneously. “It was acknowledged that participation from some sectors might take longer to achieve than others - international experience indicates that it typically takes 10 years for the concept of near-miss reporting to become embedded in an industry.”

The programme is no longer funded by the UK government and relies on the generosity of sponsors for its work – currently The Corporation of Trinity House, Lloyd’s Register Foundation, and Britannia P&I Club. “Today we work on just 25% of the level of funds available when CHIRP Maritime started,” he states, adding that the source of funding does not adversely affect the independence of the programme.

Incident reporting

Reporters of a hazardous occurrence can enter their information online at www.chirp.co.uk, submit a written report via post (freepost), or telephone the charity’s office in Farnborough. Upon receipt, reports are validated whilst maintaining the confidentiality of the source - anonymous reports are not normally acted upon as they cannot be validated. CHIRP takes user privacy very seriously. “Only de-personalised data is used in discussions with third party organisations, thereby protecting identity of the reporter. The same data is presented to the Maritime Advisory Board for their discussion, recommendations and advice on whether there is benefit in sharing the results in the Maritime Feedback publication. The results are fed back to the reporter and then on completion of the investigation, all personal details are removed from all files,” the director says.

CHIRP has successfully raised serious matters with the authorities in the past without revealing the identity of the reporter. When appropriate, report information is discussed with relevant agencies with the aim of finding a resolution. “We will only do this after discussion with the reporter and his/her agreement on the course of action we intend to take,” he added. “It would be very difficult to abuse the CHIRP process - first of all each report is reviewed by myself and then discussed with the reporter. In all cases each report is dis-identified before being discussed with the many experts on the Maritime Advisory Board. To date there are enough wise heads helping to ensure the reports are genuine and not as a result of a personal grievance.”

Obstacles faced

Rose states that it has proved challenging to increase awareness and use of the system. “Perhaps the largest barrier is convincing people to submit reports and increase their belief that a report will make a difference,” Rose says, adding that operators take CHIRP recommendations very seriously and are able to learn lessons and share good practices, thereby reducing the likelihood of expensive incidents.

He is keen to stress that CHIRP does not seek to apportion blame to any company or individual(s): “The term ‘whistleblowing’ is not one we use in CHIRP as it is often used to cast blame on an organisation or an individual. We protect the name of every reporter and those of the parties involved in the reporting process. The aim is to seek out root causes, identify the lessons learned and to consider how best this information can be used to prevent reoccurrence elsewhere in the maritime industry.”

Rose calls for a stronger contribution to CHIRP by the engineering community.
**Engineering change**

Speaking directly to *MER* readers, Rose stresses that the level of reporting from marine engineers is “significantly below” other maritime skill sets and needs to be improved. He advises: “Whilst we do not intend to undermine onboard safety management systems, there are many hazardous occurrences we know go unreported, particularly when interfacing with third parties such as bunkering, onboard contractors, drydocking, etc. I often remind people that ‘I must do something’ is much more powerful than saying ‘something must be done’.”

The programme is looking to increase the distribution of its *Maritime Feedback* publication from 33,000 back towards the 140,000 mark, and has ramped up its international social media presence through Facebook and Twitter to appeal to a younger demographic. “We are now seeing an increase in interest from seafarers in the 25-35 years of age range and are also increasing the awareness of the benefits offered to seafarers in companies based in India, China, Philippines and Singapore,” he says.

**Driving force**

Although he admits that his current job is a far cry from that of a doctor (which his mother had wished for), the director is extremely passionate about the work he does at CHIRP – particularly having spent many years on the operating side. He began as a cadet with Shell and stayed with the company for 28 years - 13 of which were at sea, and the remainder in several management positions in London, Melbourne, Aberdeen and Houston. Additionally Rose has been harbour master and chief executive at Yarmouth Harbour on the Isle of Wight for six years, and has run his own maritime consultancy specialising in ship management processes and operational safety concerns for the past eight years. He is also the chairman of the Oil Spill Working Group for the Caspian and Black Seas.

“Whilst employment is on a part time basis, there are few days that go by without me thinking about the tasks facing CHIRP’s continuing survival for a long term future,” he says. “I am passionate about the need to improve the standards of safety at sea and I was seeking a role where I can make a positive contribution to the maritime industry that I have enjoyed working in for over 40 years.”

Tapping into his nautical vein, Rose spends his days off exploring rivers and canals around the country with his wife on a bespoke narrow boat that he designed. “My wife and I enjoy the canals, last summer we spent three months away and covered over 1000 miles and operated 850 locks and swing bridges,” he says.

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**Books**

*The Shark’s Paintbrush*

**Author:** Jay Harman  
**Publisher:** White Cloud Press  
**Cost:** £20  
**ISBN-10:** 1935952846  
**ISBN-13:** 978-1935952848

The book delves into the fascinating subject of biomimicry and how new technology is developing using lessons learned in nature. As Harman explains, nature has run trillions of parallel, competitive experiments for millions of years that allow its successful designs to be extremely energy efficient and incredibly recyclable. In addition to finding wider commercial use through products such as Roman scale armour (which mimicked fish scales), barbed wire (from briars) and improved UV properties in sunscreen (through an examination of hippopotami sweat), there are other advantages to be had: aerodynamics, flow optimisation, reduced fuel use, etc.

Having grown up in Australia, the sea has played a large role in the author’s life and he spent the initial section of his career working with the Australian department of wildlife and fisheries. Combined with his love of diving, Harman’s experiences give the book a particularly strong maritime emphasis. The book has a light tone and is peppered with anecdotes from Harman’s life, most of which illustrate his long term obsession with modifying his possessions to work better through biomimicry. The author’s principles shine through in his writing, outlining his keen desire to show the link between increased efficiency and reduced waste.

One of the strongest messages put forward in the book is that of people being unwilling to upset the status quo, meaning good ideas are often shelved as they do not fit the established business plan – a valuable lesson for technology entrepreneurs. Harman’s frustration can clearly be seen when his superior designs are cast aside time and time again and the latter part of the book talks about the steps necessary to make a new design financially viable.

Given the current emphasis in the maritime industry on reducing fuel consumption and emissions, this book is likely to be of interest to marine engineers and naval architects. While probably not earthshattering in terms of bringing new information to the table, it does illustrate a lot of points with specific reference to maritime technology: propeller efficiency by looking at spiral fans; paints and coatings that would save fuel if made to mimic shark skin; hydro turbine technology looking at shark tails; and flow of water and air and also filters by looking at whales. His chapter ‘the bees knees’ which looks at insect life is also fascinating.