

safetyfocus

The Confidential Hazardous Incident Reporting Programme – CHIRP – is an independent system for all those involved in the maritime industry to report incidents of concern. CHIRP's Maritime Advisory Board has joined forces with *Safety at Sea* to provide regular insights into topical safety issues.

CHIRP
www.chirp.co.uk

Understanding the human factor

by Capt John Rose, director (maritime), CHIRP

► Judging by the reports coming to

CHIRP, in 2015 the majority of ship managers will neglect to access information on hazards encountered on board their ships and actively discourage safety reports from their ship.

Before disputing this statement, consider this: it is common practice for ship managers to use safety targets based on 'total recordable injury frequency' or 'lost time injury frequency'. To some this may appear to be commendable, but safety experts will tell you the end result of this type of recognition and reward system will have a very negative result on the open reporting of incidents, near misses, and the recording of hazardous workplace practices. This approach may have helped in the past, but it is now outdated.

I recently saw a notice on a cruise liner promoting safety awareness through a poster advertising 72 days since the last hand injury in the engine room. I read the poster message as accepting that, while the next injury is inevitable, through raising awareness it may delay that next occurrence. Even worse, the poster had not been updated for seven days, so the commitment to safety by the senior officers on board is now challenged.

Why, therefore, did the ship managers encourage such a lazy approach to safety? The campaign came over as a tick-box exercise providing little value to

the promotion of the safety policy on board.

The managers of the cruise liner are dealing with people for financial success. The importance of understanding the human element must be a core competence; after all they are carrying passengers, but in this case it does not appear to apply to the behaviours of the ship's crew and acts to the detriment of the company's safety performance.

By way of comparison, in a recent report to CHIRP from a tanker operator, an engineer cadet was seen cutting rags using an electric grinding machine. The report included a submission by the ship staff of the lessons learned that included improvements in onboard training, assessment of competence, and appropriate levels of supervision. The report was sent to the company and then shared across the fleet in its in-house safety publication.

Clearly the latter example provides a more embracing and proactive approach to safety. To achieve best results, the submission of such a report must be easy to complete and with no apportionment of blame.

Culture of silence

A UK Health and Safety Executive report issued in 2007 warned us that the use of high-value and financial incentives might cause workers to try to hide minor injuries or continue to work despite being injured, so they do not risk losing prizes. Seafarers may also feel peer pressure not to report incidents, as there could be potential negative outcome for ship-based incentives.

There could also be an opportunity for 'free-riding' by not contributing to improving safety conditions on board. These pressures can easily create friction between employees and

between employees and managers, compromising the kind of co-operation that promotes a positive safety culture.

Ship managers could look lower down the accident pyramid and calculate a target for the number of hazardous occurrences/learning events expected from each ship. Learning opportunities can be encouraged by incentivising ideas from the ships. These need not be financial rewards, but recognising high performance can be just as effective, especially if this message is given by senior managers.

A message to those senior managers complaining about operating costs: take your eyes off the bottom-line accounting book. Your time will be better spent looking at and acting on the loss of profit created by your lack of commitment to proactive safety and demonstrating more care for your employees. What better example than Coca-Cola: after an incident blinded an employee in 1991 it changed its systems and procedures and introduced its Zero Accident Behaviours (ZAB) programme. The changes increased productivity by 15%.

The shipping industry is slow to change when it comes to the reporting of hazardous occurrences. A good in-house open reporting programme will most likely create improved loyalty by the staff, improved reputation with government agencies, and clients resulting in better financial returns for the shareholders!

Remember the example often used in safety presentations, you can swat mosquitos but you will not get rid of them until you drain the swamp – open reporting of hazardous occurrences will drain that 'incident swamp'. ◀

For more info visit
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Contact

It is generally accepted that for every accident there are numerous near misses. Using a centralised and respected scheme such as CHIRP (www.chirp.co.uk), observations can be sent to reports@chirp.co.uk. These confidential reports are released to a wider audience, with anonymity retained throughout. Through this process, seafarers can initiate change and improve safety standards and design.