Let's aim for the year of safer ships

RA vessel en route from Genoa to Rotterdam had to make an unplanned 10-hour stoppage in the western approaches to the English Channel to repair a fault on the main engine. This meant the ship would be late for its planned ETA, so the master decided to make a full speed run through the Dover Strait with the engines on standby rather than the planned usual manoeuvring speed. The decision was challenged by the chief officer, but overruled.

While in the Channel, a deck cadet received some distressing news from home — and depending upon the severity of the news from home — and depending upon the severity

For those interested in learning more about the human element and how it affects their exposure to potential risk and injury — which should be every one at sea and management companies ashore — the Maritime & Coastguard Agency’s new M-notice MGN 520 (M) Human Element Guidance — Part 2 is a must read publication. Why?

It introduces the ‘deadly dozen’ — the 12 significant people factors in maritime accidents. ‘The approach can be a one-stop shop for seafarers and companies to refer to when looking at why people are doing what they do when encountering hazardous occurrences and involved in accidents.

Perhaps best of all, it is a system that is quick and easy to use. It provides easy-to-follow checklists for easy identification of each of the deadly dozen of the human element in causal factors identified in a report.

Take a look at page four of the M-notice — pictured right. If nothing else, you can use this to help ingrain your thinking into why an occurrence happened. Undertake a few of these investigations — they can take a few minutes each, and you can soon identify a trend and analysis from the reports.

For clarification on the scope of each element, the MCA provides a summary page for each, with useful ‘do’s and don’ts.’ This can help create remedial action plans and prevent recurrence of the same event with the people involved, and for sharing elsewhere in the fleet.

Each of the ‘dozen’ has good guidance on how masters and seafarers can do to improve their approach to safety.

After all, good safety performance is reliant not on individuals but on effective use of teamwork.

‘Let’s look more closely at this guideline. Here are some examples of the ‘can dos’.

For companies

1. maintaining an effective safety culture, ensuring this is a high priority onboard your ships

2. ensuring effective resource allocation — people, tools, equipment, manuals, spares, instructions, procedures, etc

3. developing an effective accident and incident reporting and analysis process and providing feedback to ships

For masters

1. creating a culture where people are not afraid to speak up

2. building an onboard safety culture, which promotes a positive attitude to working habits, monitoring, checking, updating awareness, etc

3. regularly reviewing procedures and practices with your crew

For seafarers

1. taking personal responsibility for safety

2. only attempting tasks where they are suitably qualified and experienced

3. supporting each other — if you notice someone being distracted, speak up

The MGN also raises issues to look for and provides sources of further relevant information. Perhaps a valuable start to 2017 may be to use this as a fresh approach to safety? Readers are strongly recommended to read the guidance and apply it to all incident and near-miss reports.

The Confidential Hazardous Incident Reporting Programme (CHIRP) applies this process to all its reports, and the results can be found via the search function on our website: www.maritimemchirp.org

CHIRP shared the results with the MCA, with a summary of 12 years of reports which can be found at: www.marinemo.org/mca/mgn520(m).

It is interesting to note that a similar exercise, just looking at the past four years, shows the trends and high-risk areas are very similar with a lot of learning and to the ways individuals think and react to hazards. Put simply, we are not learning fast enough!

The most frequent causal factors are:

1. Situation awareness — Did you REALLY know what’s happening?

2. Alerting — Did you really speak up when you should?

3. Communication — Did you REALLY understand each other?

4. Complacency — Is everything OK?

5. Culture — Do you REALLY have a good safety culture?

For those wanting to know more about the human element, MGN 520(M) should be read with the Human Element Guidance series of MGNs and other human element publications, such as that found in the aviation industry at: www.skybrary.aero, a reference site for aviation safety knowledge. Stick with this MCA publication and make a new year’s resolution to keep up to date. You will not be disappointed.