

Safety focus

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.



Whistleblowing can be a frightening and daunting task and people feel it is easier not to speak out

The most important difference between whistleblowing and confidential reporting is that the former is anonymous, whereas confidential is exactly that, and the concerns of the reporter can be discussed, analysed, and acted upon.

So why do we at CHIRP insist that we are not a whistleblowing organisation? First, we operate a confidential instead of anonymous reporting system. From the outset of contact, we establish a one-to-one communication with the reporter to reduce any possibility of false reporting with malicious intent. Once we have established this rapport and level of trust, we further engage with the reporter to extract and confirm the accurate details of the alleged incident.

From the very beginning of our process, we ask the reporter to confirm that other possible avenues of resolution have been explored and exhausted. We encourage the reporter to use internal company reporting schemes through their company management safety management systems – that is what they are for in the first place. But time and again, these avenues have proved closed and that is when we step in. Of course, in many scenarios, there may be an absence of an effective company reporting system – perhaps a ship-to-ship or ship-to-shore incident, where the other party is not a company asset or employee and is therefore, outside any internal safety management system.

The stigma associated with whistleblowing can often involve an element of fear, clandestine meetings, and a one-way flow of information, potentially resulting in a witch-hunt for the reporter and often resulting in termination of employment, loss of credibility, and expensive legal restitution, which in many cases is not possible. This may result in a feeling of injustice and a perception of persecution, a

contracts and legislation, it can also carry a stigma. It is often used in a derogatory fashion to denigrate the reporter’s integrity and status, although the purpose in most cases is to expose corrupt, poor, and/or unethical practice.

However, it has also been the case that some whistleblowing has been motivated by a grievance or malicious intent and/or the prospect of financial reward.

cover up, and enduring corruption.

At CHIRP Maritime, we seek to avoid extreme repercussions and go to great lengths to ensure the confidential reporter is involved at every step of the way. In our system, the reporter is advised of any potential action that we might take and must approve it. At any time, our reporter can halt the process and we will dutifully comply. The reporter remains in control of the report. Furthermore, if an individual can easily be identified, the matter will not be progressed but instead retained on file. In the event that similar reports are received, the issue will then be expedited.

We will seek a response from the respective party, such as the shipowner, manager, class society, or flag state, and will seek a satisfactory resolution and closure. At no time do we seek recompense on behalf of a reporter, nor has any ever been offered or proposed. Our aim is to extract learning to benefit the mariner and the maritime sector. In addition, we seek to correct the situation itself. It is this unique function that sets CHIRP Maritime apart and distinguishes the organisation as a world leader in maritime confidential hazardous incident reporting.

When to report

What qualifies as a hazardous occurrence? What do we listen to and take on? Principally, we look at issues that can affect the environment, health, safety, and which have a direct impact on the seafarer.

We also look at best management practice, commenting on both poor and effective examples. What we do not deal with is personal grievances and issues that may be better served by organisations such as the International Seafarers Welfare and Assistance Network (ISWAN), with which we have a memorandum of understanding to mutually refer relevant reports.

Whistleblowing is often used to raise an issue of alleged impropriety to the regulator, and this in turn may result in loss of anonymity of the reporter, or receive no interest from the regulator. By using confidential reporting, CHIRP Maritime can

maintain distance and apply direct pressure to the relevant body.

CHIRP Maritime has neither government involvement in its organisation nor other single-party involvement; it is not reliant upon single-source funding. Most importantly, CHIRP retains autonomy. It can absorb critical reactions and shield the reporter from intimidation and retribution.

Crucially, CHIRP Maritime is international and draws upon a substantial network of contacts through ambassadors and established routes developed for more than 15 years of operation in this field.

Answering a need

A confidential incident reporting system is a mechanism that allows problems in safety-critical fields such as aviation and maritime to be reported in confidence. This in turn allows incidents to be highlighted instead of being kept quiet due to fear of blame or reprisals against the reporter.

In the United Kingdom, the aviation industry is subject to mandatory reporting of technical faults, but such a requirement does not exist in the maritime world. An analysis of the reported incidents can also provide insight into how those incidents occurred and, through such identification, the possibility of recurrence can be mitigated or removed.

But how is CHIRP able to maintain confidentiality and reassure the reporter? Our process is one of limiting access to the reporter and ‘dis-identifying’ the information. Only one or two people within CHIRP will know the identity of the reporter. Once the incident information is submitted, we go to great lengths to ensure the report does not identify an individual, company, or vessel and, especially, the reporter. All information about a reporter is destroyed on completion of every report.

Once the report has been suitably dis-identified, it is then forwarded to the CHIRP Maritime Advisory Board for consideration and again the identity of the reporter is not revealed. The board consists of 28 experts whose specialist knowledge covers a vast area

What makes us different from whistleblowing?

- CHIRP Maritime is completely autonomous without government intervention
- We go to great lengths to protect our reporters
- We go the extra mile in finding resolution, in challenging those that need to be challenged
- We will ask questions that others will not
- We will not hide behind the veil of fear
- CHIRP Maritime puts the mariner first

of expertise in considerable depth. We have marine pilots, human element professionals, military and commercial professionals, offshore, pleasure yachting, and fishing experts, as well as professional casualty investigators, law firms, and P&I and union representatives. And if the expertise is not readily available, we will be able to find it through our network of contacts.

Finally, once the advisory process is exhausted and advice issued, it is either conveyed back to the reporter and/or actioned by the CHIRP Maritime adviser. Quite often, if the subject is of sufficient merit, a specialist ‘insight article’ will be constructed and posted. Recent articles have included ‘Rigging of combination ladders’ and ‘Issues with ECDIS’.

Upon reaching closure of the report, the reporter’s personal details are automatically deleted from the CHIRP Maritime database so even CHIRP cannot make further contact with the reporter. By following this protocol, only a small number of active reports are ever ‘live’ on the CHIRP Maritime database and it is this limiting process, along with a secure and remote IT system, that protects our reporters and ensures enduring confidentiality.

It is this process that makes CHIRP Maritime the foremost maritime confidential hazardous incident reporting programme in the world. It will continue to reach out across the globe and strives to connect with those who matter. [\[i\]](#)

The stigma of ‘whistleblowing’

Capt Jeff Parfitt

Director (maritime), CHIRP Charitable Trust

► It is a common view that someone who submits a confidential report on a hazardous occurrence is just the same as a whistleblower. We at CHIRP Maritime do not share that view.

While whistleblowing is a common term often included in official employment

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.

‘While whistleblowing is a common term often included in official employment contracts and legislation, it can also carry a stigma. It’s often used in a derogatory fashion’

Capt Jeff Parfitt, Director (maritime), CHIRP Charitable Trust

For more info visit

www.chirpmaritime.org

mail@chirp.co.uk