The stigma of ‘whistleblowing’

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 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 will be taken 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, that is, the owner, 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 organisational and regulatory 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 issues of alleged improperity to the regulator, and this 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

Whistleblowing can be a frightening and daunting task and people feel it is easier not to speak out. However, it has also been the case that some whistleblowing has been motivated by prospect of financial reward.

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 its standards? Quite often, if the subject is of sufficient merit, a specialist ‘insight article’ will be constructed and posted. Recent articles have included ‘Barging of composite’ and ‘Cradle failures’.

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 ‘Barging of composite’ and ‘Cradle failures’.

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 process, 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.

What makes us different from whistleblowing?

• CHIRP Maritime is completely autonomous without government intervention.
• We do not seek recompense on behalf of the reporter.
• We do not seek to influence the reporter.
• We will ask questions that others will not.
• We will not hide behind the veil of fear.
• CHIRP Maritime puts the mariner first.

What is covered

What is not covered

• CHIRP Maritime may ask questions that others will not.

Contact

It is generally accepted that for every accident there are numerous near misses. Using a centralised and respected scheme such as CHIRP Maritime’s Confidential Incident Awareness Program (CHIRP), saves lives, protects ships and their crews, gives timely and expert advice on safety, and maintains good practice in the maritime environment.

If you believe you have encountered a hazardous or near-hazardous occurrence, contact CHIRP Maritime.

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

www.chirp.co.uk

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