



KISH P & I LOSS PREVENTION CIRCULAR KPI-LP-157-2014 **(Back-Ache; A Major Ship-Board Problem)**

► The Importance:

Looking at the human related accidents; we can see that every year, many seafarers are injured through incorrect lifting, carrying and pulling loads. Back-aches & injuries are amongst the most common types of injuries suffered by ships' crew and can have serious implications for both the seafarer and the ship-owner. An injured seafarer may find that his ability to do his job is affected and that his lifestyle in general may have to change. With the existence of MLC & possible permanent or partial disability claims; ship-owners on the other hand may have to bear substantial costs when an injured seafarer is unable to perform his duties on board.

Since most back injuries are preventable, primarily by the use of proper lifting techniques, the purpose of these notes is to remind ship-owners and crew of the importance of adhering to the proper instructions for lifting and manual handling of loads. (Regardless of the type of work and the time schedule involved in each particular task)

► The P & I approach:

Crew claims are those originating from illness, injury or death amongst ships' crew. A review of all such crew claims over the last 10 years in a reputable claims handling association shows that crew injuries make up quite a substantial part of all P&I claims costs. Over the said period, close to 10% of total claims costs were generated by

crew injuries alone. Furthermore, back injury is by far the most expensive injury type, representing some 25% of all of crew injury claims costs.

A review of the injury cases registered as occurring in a specific location on board indicates that almost half of all back injuries occur during work on deck or in the engine room. It is not possible to conclude that the age of the crew members involved in back injury cases is a contributing factor.

In one of the cases registered; a seafarer complained of pain in his lower back, extending to his lower extremities, after a work operation involving lifting of the gangway. As his symptoms persisted, a doctor on shore was consulted and the seafarer was medicated and repatriated to his home country for further evaluation and treatment. The seafarer's disability grade was assessed to be high and, as the injury appeared to have incurred during his work on board, he was given 100% disability compensation.

It is important to mention that the cost of each element may vary dramatically between different geographical locations, e.g. medical expenses in the U.S. can easily amount to USD 200,000 in a single case and even higher if hospital intensive care is required as daily hospital rates in the U.S. can be of the order of USD 25,000.

Even the places which were not known to be expensive can come up with very huge claims. In China; some agents

may pressurize the ship-owners to place the patients in special hospitals - like the hotels- so called for foreigners & the costs can be very close to high figures as in Japan; North Europe or even the US.

► Factors contributing to back injuries:

The mere life on board especially in a boisterous weather & lots of ship's free movements in the so called 6 degrees; can by itself be damaging for parts of your body & specifically the bearer skeleton, the main part of which is the spine & the back-bones.

Some of the most common contributing factors to acute back injury relate to bad body mechanics, in other words, how we lift, push, pull, or carry objects; poor physical condition; poor design of job or work station; heavy lifting and/or poor underfoot surfaces such as slippery floors. It can be particularly challenging to carry out manual work tasks in a safe manner on board ships. Ships can be quite hazardous working environments and harsh weather conditions and movements of the ship are factors that must be taken into account. Decks can also be extremely slippery when continuously washed by the sea. Another challenge related to ship operations is time. With time being a critical factor, crew may sometimes feel pressured to take short-cuts and use unsafe working practices to achieve the planned sailing schedule.

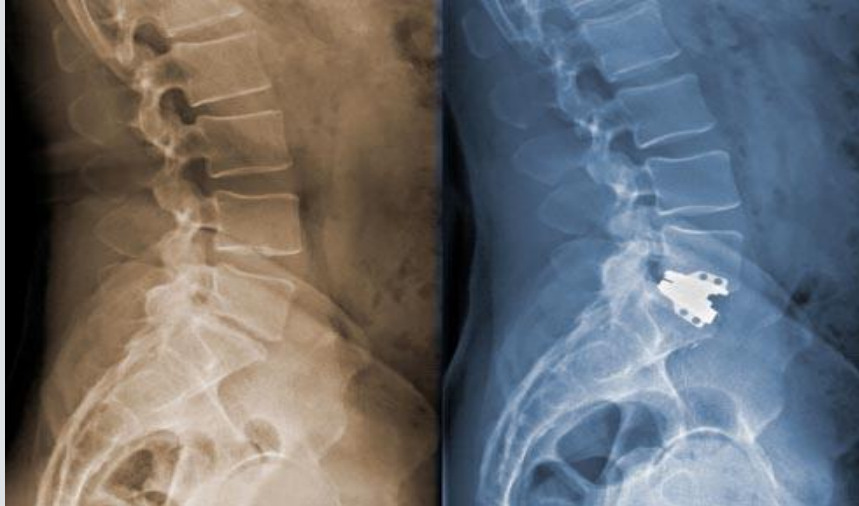
The operation of a ship naturally involves a lot of physical activity and lifting of heavy loads by crew members and the consequences may be a

gradual development of a back disorder over time. Signs of a potentially serious injury are often ignored because the pain is perceived as “normal” and bearable. Therefore, while an acute back injury may appear to have been caused by a single well-defined incident, weakening of the musculoskeletal support mechanism through years of incorrect working activities is instead the real cause of the injury.

► The regulatory requirements:

Health and safety on board ships is regulated by the laws of each flag state and an important document in this respect is the Maritime Labour Convention (MLC) which is already in force. Regulation 4.3 of the MLC deals with health and safety protection and accident prevention but does not specify details. Instead the MLC stipulates what should be addressed by the flag state regulations. Various international and national standards define the acceptable levels of exposure to workplace hazards as well as how to develop and put into practice a ship's occupational health policy.

It is important to emphasize that ship-owners have a duty to put such regulations into practice but that each crew member has an obligation to comply with the specific standards and policies applicable on board their ship. Crew members must take reasonable care of their own health and safety and that of others on board that may be affected by their activities and must immediately report incidents and near-misses to the designated officer.



► **Prevention of back injuries:**

Fortunately, most flag states and ship-owners take pride in providing their seafarers with good working conditions. However, with the entry into force of the MLC in 2013, all club members and clients have a clear regulatory responsibility to ensure that the crew's work environment on board ships promotes occupational health and safety. Most occupational accidents and back injuries occur whilst performing daily routine duties and preventive measures should therefore focus on workplace instructions for all important functions on board and not only for high risk tasks such as mooring or repair work in the engine rooms.

It is recommended to:

1. Regularly assess the risks associated with each work task and improve procedures and equipment if necessary.
2. Lifting and work equipment provided must be suitable for its intended use.
3. Plan jobs to eliminate or minimize the need for work to be performed in awkward positions.
4. Customize training for each work group. Include basic instructions in anatomy and focus on the risk factors associated with poor body positioning.
5. Draw attention to the correct methods of bending, lifting and carrying at every opportunity such as during safety meetings and "toolbox talks". Awareness posters and instructions along with graphic illustrations of manual handling techniques should be posted at important locations on board.
6. Stress the importance of teamwork. Work with a partner to share a load and obtain mechanical assistance for heavy and/or oversized loads when necessary.
7. Encourage early reporting of symptoms such as neck or back pains. If individuals with reduced robustness can be detected, acute back injuries can be prevented before they can happen. Early reporting can often make the difference

between a relatively short treatment and recovery period and long term permanent disability.

8. Promote exercise: A well-toned body can take unexpected stresses or strains better than one suffering from lack of exercise.



Statistical data indicate that back injuries alone account for a significant amount of human suffering, loss of productivity, and economic burden on compensation systems in the maritime industry and clearly demonstrate that personnel health and safety is of utmost importance on board a ship. By

providing a safe and secure working environment on board, including opportunities for training, ship owners can facilitate the possibility for each individual working on board to take care of their own and fellow crew's personnel safety.