

KISH P & I LOSS PREVENTION
CIRCULAR KPI-LP-35-2012

(Rise in Claims; Seafarers' Experience & Human Interface)

➤ **Outcome of Claims study:**

A recent claims study in reaction to a 60% increase in hull and machinery claims over a three year period, has pointed out the skill shortages as one of the principal reasons for this rise. A substantial rise in the cost of individual claims, and an increased frequency of claims, led to the detailed analysis, which points to a number of common causes. None of these might be considered new or particularly surprising, with a lack of knowledge, the failure to follow procedures and inadequate resource management being three of the key issues identified.

The findings match with that of analyses by the accident investigators and others, suggesting that there is a growing shortage of experienced seafarers in a global fleet that continues to increase. Others have pointed to the increased intensity of marine operations and it is certainly identifying excessive speed as a recurring issue, noting that situational awareness would often have been enhanced if the ship or operation had been slowed to a more reasonable speed.

The “human interface” between the operator and increasingly complicated equipment has also registered to be a problem, with over-confidence of ships’ officers who believe (erroneously) that they fully understand their equipment being seen as a cause of accidents. New equipment and procedures such as the major practical changes being implemented with the arrival of ECDIS and electronic charts has also been problematical. Groundings and collisions have been caused

because of a lack of knowledge about what officers were seeing as they monitored equipment. The importance of relevant and adequate training is emphasized upon unanimously.

It is equally as important to point out the need for a universally acceptable “near miss” reporting system, noting that its absence does not encourage such reporting. Because of this “missing link”, any trend may not be properly identified before accidents actually happen. Best practice, in this respect, needed to be shared more widely.

Failure to follow procedures, as quoted by many experts, is undoubtedly a leading cause of accidents, and it points to the lack of a “safety culture” where such accidents tend to occur. The widespread use of multinational manning reinforces the need for this cultural shift.

Other studies, not least the BIMCO/ISF manpower updates, have forecast this skills shortage, pointing out in their several editions the ageing of the seafaring population, the disappearance of the very experienced OECD officers as they reach retirement age and the need to address the “experience gap” their retirement is causing.

While it may accelerate promotion of younger officers, the fact of their lack of experience has also been recognized by the best operators, which have in place programmes to “up-skill” younger officers before they are promoted. When it is merely assumed that inexperienced officers will learn quickly once they are in post, there is a risk (borne out by studies like that of the various P & I Clubs) that this assumption will turn out to be unfounded, and the officer will be unable to react properly in the event of a serious, or non-routine, problem and will “learn the hard way!”