

Risk assessment; benefits, obstacles, recommendations

Dear Member;

In July 2010, ISM new set of amendments entered into force and with that, performing a risk assessment prior undertaking a critical operation became a must. Companies and vessels were required to maintain a data base of risk assessments completed for potentially hazardous operations, and revisit them at specified interval to keep them update.

a) Benefits

Risk assessment is a proactive method to identify and deal with potential hazards of a risky operation and in that sense it has a unique value. Checklists although useful, however they only provide a snapshot of control measures to overcome certain hazards for the time it had been developed, plus checklists are usually of a much generalized nature. Another drawback of checklist is danger of its mass production on the computer away from the time and place of the operation which can lead to lapses in considering certain vital safety precautions. However with an active risk assessment, staff involved can consider majority of hazards belonging to that particular operation and for that specific time and place.

For instance there are many checklists developed for hotwork, however none of them are exhaustive in listing all the possible hazards and eventualities. This is the moment that risk assessment can help to identify very specific hazards for that time and location. Then in the stage of **risk management**, staff can develop control measures or those hazards.

Another benefit of risk assessment is TEAM involvement for identifying hazards and establishing control measures. This will ensure more staffs are aware of the risks and hence better safety awareness.

b) Obstacles

Despite above benefits, however feedback received indicates risk assessment, after almost one and half years of becoming mandatory, is not properly implemented yet. In many cases it had become a mere paper work exercise, which either been copied from others or done after the job was completed (only for the sake of record keeping). In many cases the essential notion of teamwork for risk assessment been put aside and a single person had done the assessment. In **KPI** we believe following factors are influential on such poor compliance:

- 1) Lack of proper training for those staffs who were supposed to perform risk assessment.
- 2) Complicated procedures and lengthy process of risk assessment.

3) Lack of safety culture in the company and on board company ships.

4) Lack of monitoring by head office. During internal audits, auditors had not verified the records of risk assessments in detail. Such verification will ensure an onsite coaching as well as demonstrating the importance company attaches to this issue.

c) Recommendations

In order to overcome the obstacles for a proper risk assessment **KPI** has following recommendations:

1) Risk assessment trainings in the form of practical workshops shall be held for both shore and ship staff. During those workshops attempt shall be made to follow the company's **specific** format rather than a general training.

2) The procedures for risk assessment shall be simplified (keep it simple for sailors). One of the simple and efficient methods had been detailed in the UK's **Code of Safe Working Practice for Merchant Seamen**. Some companies in order to provide guideline to their staff had prepared a database of generic risk assessment. Others had required a toolbox meeting before any critical job. For such meetings, company shall provide a set of guidelines covering hazards associated with certain types of frequently undertaken critical jobs. During meeting, staff shall consider those guidelines as based and then try to identify any additional hazards for that particular time and location.

3) Risk assessment is an essential element to develop a **safety culture** in an organization. At the same time unless a proper safety culture has not been established, one cannot expect proper compliance with risk assessment requirements. It is recommended to motivate staff in following risk assessment requirements, and even establish a rewarding mechanism for those who take active part.

4) Internal audit is not a policing exercise to blame for any short comings, but it is a very good opportunity to train and coach the staff. It is recommended to go into details of conducted risk assessment during internal audit, in order to find the weak points and then try to eliminate them by onsite training.

Loss Prevention

KPI