Q: “Is fatigue well managed by the shipping industry?”

SAFETY4SEA, in association with the North of England P&I Club, discusses topical industry issues.

The global shipping industry is tightly regulated, with international conventions pre-scribing minimum rest hours for seafarers: another mandate the carriage of minimum safe manning documents. All are subject to inspection by port states and ships’ flags. While the requirements may be daunting, many seafarers and companies must implement safety management systems, which are subject to inspection. Effective safety leadership and bridge resource management, along with decent accommodation and living working conditions also help minimize seafarer fatigue. However, the industry cannot afford to be complacent. The recent revision of Title 2 of the MLC addressing hours of work and rest will go a long way in reducing the cumulative effects of fatigue over the length of a seafarer’s contract.

The evidence is overwhewling. Research, such as Project Martha, has shown that there is still widespread abuse of hours worked. CHIRP receives reports of flogged hours of rest as seafarers continue to work under duress, afraid for their jobs and/or intimidated by their managers. It is clear from the size and complexity of modern ships that it is not possible to operate such vessels at maximum efficiency with barely serviceable crew numbers. And, with voyage lengths still upward of 9 months for many, fatigue inevit- ably takes its toll. Although many companies and vessels do manage hours of work and fatigue effectively, it is naïve to assume that the industry universally manages fatigue properly.

No

A general misconception still exists equating fatigue to sleeplessness, primarily through a lack of sleep. It’s so much more than that. The effectiveness of any current legisla- tion appears limited despite being accompanied by good guidance and enforcement is difficult. The indus- try needs to acknowledge that mere compliance with the minimum num- ber of hours of rest prescribed in MLC and STCW does not necessarily pre- vent fatigue. Only proper fatigue risk management will be effective, encom- passing better education, openness in fatigue incident reporting and more accurate monitoring of fatigue levels. Dealing with factors such as quality of sleep, stress and the demands of work will go a long way to reduce the cumulative effects of fatigue over the length of a seafarer’s contract.

Seafarers’ fatigue reflects the organization of the in- dustry and is a symptom of current operational practices. Without strong top-down legislation to create a level playing field, it is no surprise that fa- tigue has become such a significant problem. Legislation often focuses on one aspect of fatigue, such as work- ing hours, without also addressing other underlying problems such as under manning and fast port turna- rounds. Those who should policing the industry (the Flag States) are in com- petition, as are the agents, of the ships. Fatigue Management Systems do not address the underlying causes and no amount of fatigue awareness training will mitigate against working 100 hours on an under-manned ship that is frequently going in and out of port.

No

The recently published report on the grounding of the Islay Trader found that a critical causative factor was ‘fatigue’. Many operational procedures of only having two watchkeepers onboard the vessel. This comes 14 years on from the publication of the MAIB’s bridge watch study which concluded that the two watchkeeper system ‘frequently leads to accidents’. These examples are part of a large body of ev- idence which proves that working hours permitted onboard is unsafe. Yet, any attempt to bring working time down to a level that would be considered acceptable in any other safety critical industry is met with fierce opposition by Ship- owners and Flag States, and fatigue at sea is a scandal which has plagued the industry for far too long.

No

The North of England P&I Club’s latest issue looks at fatigue management. Two major international conventions pre-scribe minimum rest hours for seafarers: another mandate the carriage of minimum safe manning documents. All are subject to inspection by port states and ships’ flags. While the requirements may be daunting, many seafarers and companies must implement safety management systems, which are subject to inspection. Effective safety leadership and bridge resource management, along with decent accommodation and living working conditions also help minimize seafarer fatigue. However, the industry cannot afford to be complacent. The recent revision of Title 2 of the MLC addressing hours of work and rest will go a long way in reducing the cumulative effects of fatigue over the length of a seafarer’s contract.

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Maybe

Effective fatigue Manage- ment requires more than just form filling by seafarers. It requires a real commitment from the company, their managers and the industry. In our 24/7 business environment, it must be established that the world will not end if a ship is stopped for 6 hours. Everybody must understand that the key to giving seafarers require adequate rest. Seafarers must also recognize that their bodies have biological demands requiring rest. In the tanker industry we are fortunate that a Master can take a stand and require adequate rest. Seafarers must understand that a real commitment from the world is needed. Two major international conventions pre-scribe minimum rest hours for seafarers: another mandate the carriage of minimum safe manning documents. All are subject to inspection by port states and ships’ flags. While the requirements may be daunting, many seafarers and companies must implement safety management systems, which are subject to inspection. Effective safety leadership and bridge resource management, along with decent accommodation and living working conditions also help minimize seafarer fatigue. However, the industry cannot afford to be complacent. The recent revision of Title 2 of the MLC addressing hours of work and rest will go a long way in reducing the cumulative effects of fatigue over the length of a seafarer’s contract.

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