



Comment on manning of navigation bridges on vessels

For several years the VHT has repeatedly observed claims which could easily have been avoided by the manning of the navigation bridge in accordance with the regulations. In particular these claims were related to groundings of vessels and collisions with other vessels or port facilities. In the last 12 months alone 6 casualties of this kind, amounting to a total of EUR 14 M., have occurred in the relevant market served by the VHT.

Inadequate manning of the bridge has been found to have caused each of the above mentioned incidents with the most serious consequences resulting from groundings where the officer on duty had fallen asleep on the bridge without a look out being present. Such accidents could undoubtedly have been prevented if the bridge had been manned in accordance with the regulations. There have also been accidents where the officer on duty had to deal with a critical situation requiring more actions in a short space of time than he could reasonably cope with. For instance when the officer on duty had to swiftly alter the course of his vessel himself because the missing look out could not take over the helmsman duties. All of these accidents occurred between dusk and dawn.

The requirements concerning the manning of the navigation bridge are clearly defined within the framework of international agreements. The rules concerning the prevention of collisions dictate that a proper look out must be maintained at all times (COLREG, rule 5, lookout). It is moreover laid down in STCW 95 that the look out has to be manned by a skilled seaman in addition to the officer on duty. Under particular circumstances determined in STCW 95 the officer on duty is allowed to do the look out's job in addition to his own job. This is however meant to be an exception to the rule which has to be decided on from case to case. The basic condition for this procedure is that daylight prevails. **Sailing in the dark without a look out is therefore an infringement of the rules.**

The above mentioned COLREG and STCW rules are internationally binding and cannot simply be disregarded. These rules must be observed irrespective of the use of guard ring alarms on the radar or 'dead man alarms'. The same applies for the practice of allowing the look out to leave his post while dark for a break ("smoking time") or to wake up the relief.

To shipping companies with corresponding certification the ISM code prescribes a wide range of instruments designed to detect and correct defects within the companies' as well as the vessel's operations. This also includes the information of the management about defects in the system and their eradication, and is therefore considered to be the management's share in dealing with problem areas.

The VHT is indeed concerned about the apparently deficient manning of navigation bridges on a number of vessels. The VHT members are recommended to draw the attention of the insured shipping companies to the above problem so that they can identify, analyse and correct potential problems within their fleet with the help of the aforementioned ISM instruments.

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