

UAE

Lifeboat safety

On 17 January the UAE Branch held a meeting on lifeboat safety, in response to recent articles in *Seaways*. The meeting took the form of three short presentations, two from branch members who are also company safety officers and one from a representative of a lifeboat and liferaft service company. Following the presentations the floor was opened to general discussion and then a survey of opinions carried out. The following is a summary of the meeting.

Perception

Lifeboats do work and indeed do save more lives than they endanger. A recent example was the safe evacuation of the cruise ship *Explorer* which sank after contact with an iceberg, a rather different outcome to the *Titanic* of almost 100 years ago. The current perception among seafarers is rather different why?

- **Incident record.** The human element seems to be the most significant factor in the root cause of most lifeboat incidents. Incorrect operation and lack of/poor maintenance were most often cited in reports.
- **Equipment.** The equipment currently fitted on board is complex and has poor instruction and training materials. Little or no CBT exists to assist with training.



▲ The Institute's new book *Leadership Throughout* was launched at the UAE Branch in February. The picture shows the author, Richard Jeffreys, signing copies. On the right is Julian Parker, the Institute's Publisher.

Due to the perception that the operation of lifeboats is high risk, ships' crews are not given sufficient exposure to their operation.

Most companies have gone to great lengths to ensure that lifeboat operation and maintenance is carried out as safely as possible. Employing 'safety strops', which prevent boats being released from hooks while maintenance and other routine operations are conducted, have proved effective and have prevented a number of incidents. However these kind of precautions, now seen as necessary by many, do not instil confidence in the crew.

The sometimes violent motion of the boat while it is being lowered is another factor. True, the erratic swinging of the boat is most often caused by the misoperation of the brake lever but the crews witness this motion and are reluctant to subject themselves to such excesses. Can the design be improved to reduce the impact of the human operator?

Maintenance

Poor maintenance has been responsible for a number of incidents. Traditionally the lifeboat is the responsibility of a junior officer, normally the third officer. Today planned maintenance systems will usually generate work orders for the lifeboat maintenance. Are these work orders completed by a competent person who is knowledgeable and trained in the lifeboat systems?

Similarly, the flag state, port state and class surveyors all take it in turns to look closely at lifeboats but do they all possess the knowledge and training to correctly assess the boat's condition? One prominent body has recently declared that its surveyors will not enter a lifeboat until it has been suitably secured against accidental release. This must further undermine the crew's confidence in their primary means of escape.

Effective shore-based maintenance performed by qualified experts is certainly a major step forward. However there have been examples of service engineers from less

reputable companies boarding vessels without the proper training, tools or spares.

To have any credence, all shore-based maintenance providers must be accredited by an independent body to confirm that their personnel are duly qualified and correctly trained.

Training

Training in the systems, operation and maintenance would appear to be the key element. Familiarity with systems can only be obtained by regular use and exposure. Should we be operating the boats and systems more frequently rather than trying to find excuses for postponing drills because an incident might occur?

Some shore training facilities are still conducting training using open boats and off-load release systems. It is therefore possible that some senior officers will lack the necessary training and experience to oversee the maintenance of complex modern lifeboat systems?

Passenger vessels do not seem to have the same incident rate as other vessels. Is this because the boats are regularly used to transport passengers to and from anchorages, and the crew are therefore better trained and more familiar with the operation?

- **Free fall v davit launch.** The preferred option would appear to be free fall; but a free-fall boat shares issues of training and maintenance.
- **Owner's role.** Several delegates stated that the owners are not prepared to spend more than the minimum necessary on real safety oriented systems.
- **Radical thinking.** There was a suggestion from the floor that the whole concept as we accept it should be changed (lifeboats as devices which are launched – and then retrieved). The vast majority of accidents occur during retrieval therefore should we not be thinking of an 'escape pod' concept. The existing freefall boat is the closest we have to that.

Industry approach. We urgently need standardisation of design (IMO); flag state legislation (IMO); and accreditation of Shore based maintenance providers (IMO).



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