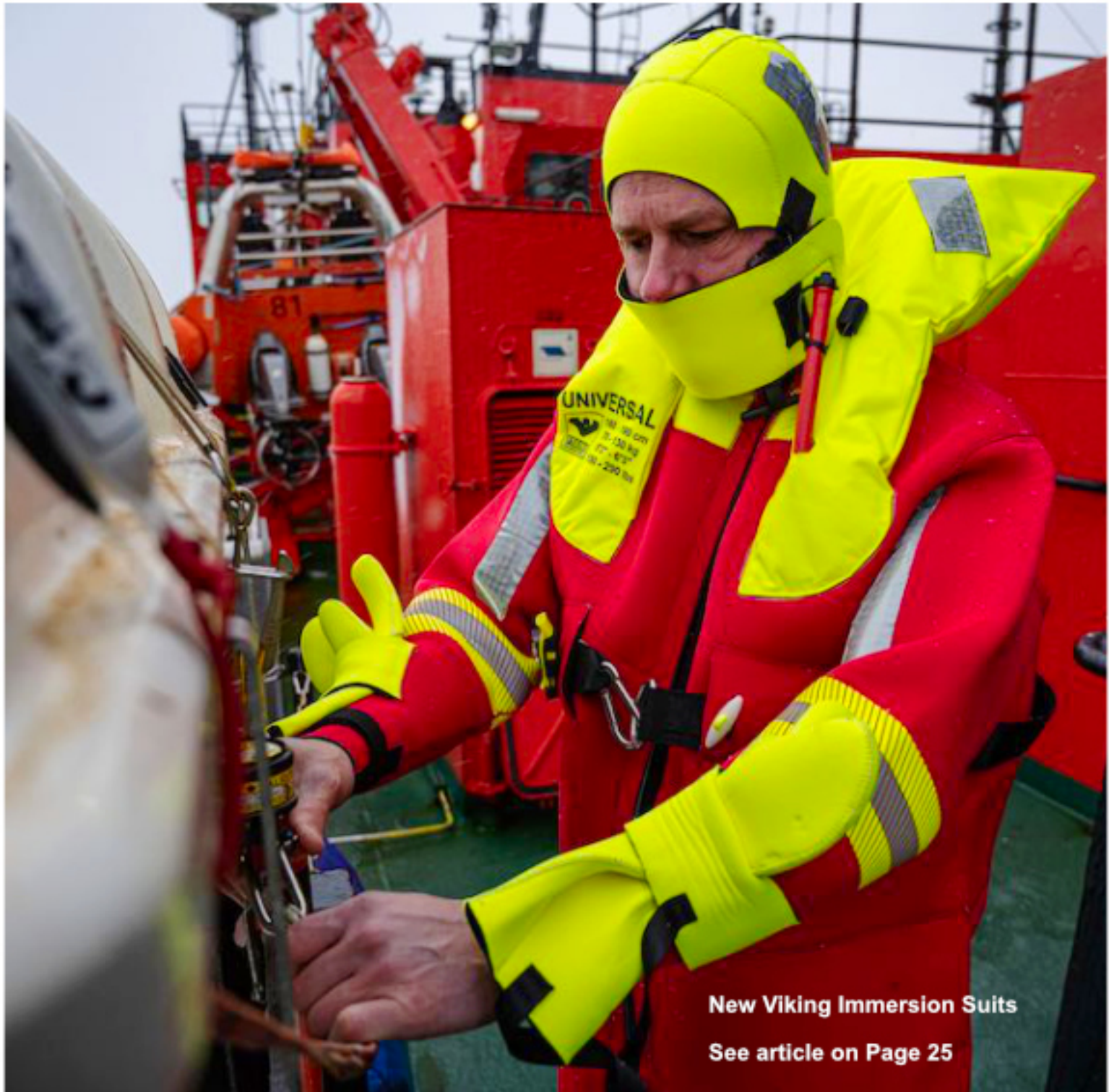


Number 100 May 2026

IF SMA

NEWSLETTER

The Shipmasters' International Voice



New Viking Immersion Suits

See article on Page 25



Contents

Secretary General's Message	2
From the News Editor	3
The IMO Digest	4
Legal Committee (LEG 113) opening remarks	4
Hazardous cargo compensation regime	5
France - United Kingdom Strait of Hormuz summit	6
IMO approves new guidelines on ship registration	8
Eastern and Southern Africa: Digitalisation	9
IMO Legal Committee (LEG 113) closing remarks	10
Trapped in the Persian Gulf	10
IMO S-G at the UN	11
Asia-Pacific Heads of Maritime Safety Agencies annual meeting	12
IMO progresses work: Ship emissions, pollution and ocean protection	13
Cargo vessel <i>Lem Verbena</i> fire	15
Innocence at stake, by Michael Grey	18
CHIRP Annual Digest of Reports and Insights 2025-2026	19
Gulf traffic, Singapore, UNCLOS, USN blockade	19
A revolutionary balanced lashing system	20
International Arctic Meeting	21
Copernicus (Faroe Islands)	21
Copernicus (Scandinavian Peninsula)	22
ISWAN Practical guidance for seafarers	22
Mission to Seafarers	23
Time travellers in the Straits, by Michael Grey	24
Navigational risks in a rapidly changing Arctic	24
Immersion suit rises to challenge for faster protection	25
Swedish Club warning: Carriage of Baled Refuse-Derived Fuel (RDF)	26
INTERCARGO advice	27
Knowledge gaps	27

Readers are reminded that the opinions expressed in the IFSMA Newsletter are those of the various authors and providers of news and are not necessarily in accord with IFSMA policy.

Secretary General's Message

From us at IFSMA, we hope you are all well.

There was much underway in the maritime industry in April and it doesn't look as if the pace is going to slow down.

I have to start with the continuing situation in the Persian Gulf and the blockage in the Strait of Hormuz. Seafarers remain the people that are impacted by events over which they have no control. These circumstances have been highlighted by the IMO's Secretary General but the conflict still remains in the region. Reports of mines in the Strait of Hormuz creates the longer-term concern as clearing mines effectively, takes time.

Officers from the Maritime Labour Convention 2006 tripartite committee that represent seafarers, shipowners and governments, have raised grave concerns regarding how seafarers are being treated in the Persian Gulf. They call on International Labour Organization (ILO) member states to take action and reaffirm that all MLC 2006 requirements remain active and in-force in conflict areas.

It has been widely reported that some companies and maritime nations have made arrangements to pass through the Strait of Hormuz. Reports state that these arrangements could involve payments to make the transit. This has opened wider concerns that other heavily used seagoing waterways could also be subject to transit charges. The Strait of Malacca is an example. The International Maritime Organization has made it very clear that they are completely opposed to charging and stress that free navigation across our international waters should be completely unrestricted.

At the end of April, the Marine Environment Protection Committee (MEPC) sat in IMO. The discussion continued regarding the Net Zero Framework which has the intention of reducing carbon emissions on all ships and supporting developing countries in the drive for net-zero. This would be achieved by introducing a levy on ships based on their carbon emissions. In 2025, this issue was discussed and created a heated debate between national delegations; the result of which was a delay to any agreement for twelve-months. At the MEPC in April, agreement was still not reached and more discussions will take place at the next MEPC near the end of 2026.

In addition, at the Marine Environment Protection Committee there were some significant decisions made. A new Emissions Control Area (ECA) for the NE Atlantic was agreed. This will introduce stricter controls on nitrogen oxides and sulphur oxides in the region. The Committee also adopted an action plan to address Marine Plastic Litter from ships to eliminate this type of pollution by 2030.

To get more information on these topics and all maritime news, please explore our new website at

www.ifsma.org and follow us on LinkedIn and Facebook where we highlight our latest news, initiatives and updates.

We wish you the very best and safe sailing in these troubled times.

From the News Editor

Shanghai: The Story of China's Most Dynamic City

This volume is a welcome new history of Shanghai, revealing its vital place in Chinese history and politics across the centuries.



Home to 25 million people, Shanghai is the most populous and wealthiest city in China. A meeting point between China and the wider world, the city has become the beating heart of Chinese capitalism, a place of initiative, confidence, and forward thinking. It is a city of stark contradictions, suffused with both extreme wealth and poverty, luxury living, and a highly organised criminal underworld.

The port city of Shanghai is China's leading commercial and financial centre, and it has been called the world's fastest-growing economy. Much of the city's architectural style is unique and

recognizable in its range of height, design, colour, and unusual features.

Shanghai lies on the Huangpu River, part of the Yangtze delta at which China's main waterway completes its 6,300-km (3,900-mi) journey to the Pacific (from the Tibet Plateau to the East China Sea). The river contributes 20% of China's GDP. Until 1842 Shanghai's location made it merely a small fishing village. After the Opium War and the Treaty of Nanjing that year the British regarded Shanghai as a treaty port, opening the city to foreign involvement.

By 1863 this village had been turned into a city carved up into autonomous concessions each administered concurrently by the British, French, and Americans, all independent of Chinese law. Each colonial presence brought with it its particular culture, architecture, and society. They flourished until the Japanese occupation of 1941 reopened in some way in 1946 and closed finally in 1949 when the Chinese Communist party took control.



Shanghai shipping: oil/chemical tanker Samho Ibis and the SD14 class New Legend Star on the Huangpu River, 2006.

Michael Dillon explores the full history of Shanghai, from its origins to the bustling financial hub of today. The city has been central to some of the most turbulent events in China's modern history, from the British and French colonial concessions of the nineteenth century, to the birth of the Chinese Communist Party and its vital role in Chinese economics and politics today. *Shanghai* is a fascinating portrait of China's most dynamic city—and explores its future role in the country's development.

One creation of the 19th century was that of the Maritime Customs with HQ on the Bund. It was here that harbour and waterway management, weather reporting, and anti-smuggling operations were planned and conducted as it charted, lit, and policed the China coast and the Yangzi river in much the same way as today's Maritime Safety Administration operates.

Shanghai Port hit a historic milestone as it successfully handled its 50 millionth TEU of the year 2025 at the Yangshan Automated Terminal on 22 December last. This set a new world record in

- *The paramount importance of the safety of seafarers and shipping.*
- *The conviction that seafarers and shipping must never be used as collateral victims of any geopolitical conflict.*
- *The importance of dialogue and diplomacy de-escalating tensions and restoring stability in the region.*

‘I have initiated work on this important matter with my team and have been engaging with relevant stakeholders. Any mechanism is being developed in line with the IMO established Traffic Separation Scheme, in place since 1968, and jointly coordinated by Oman and Iran, while fully respecting the principles of freedom of navigation and the right of innocent passage enshrined in international maritime law.



The IFSMA Delegation at the IMO Legal Committee

‘I would like to thank you for your continued support, which I highly value and appreciate. We remain committed to multilateralism and sustained dialogue, and I look forward to maintaining our engagement on this important issue for the benefit of innocent seafarers and international shipping.’

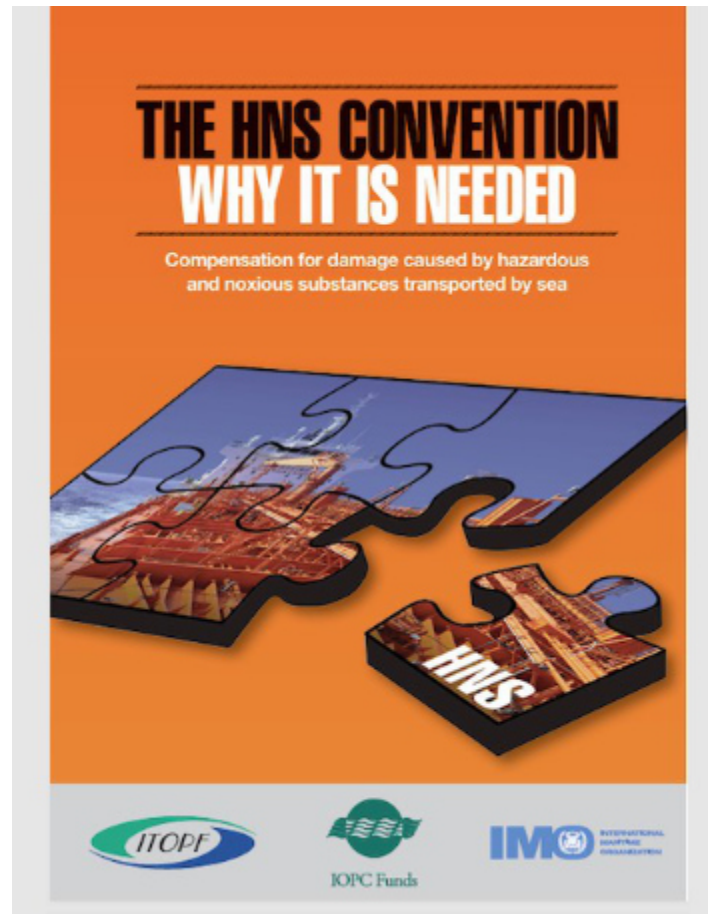
Hazardous cargo compensation regime

Closer to entry into force

Belgium, Germany, the Kingdom of Netherlands and Sweden deposit ratifications to 2010 HNS Convention.

Four States deposited their instruments of ratification of the International Convention on Liability and Compensation for Damage in Connection with the Carriage of Hazardous and Noxious Substances by Sea, 2010 (2010 HNS Convention), bringing the treaty’s entry into force a step closer.

The 2010 HNS Convention aims to ensure adequate, prompt, and effective compensation for those affected by incidents involving hazardous and noxious substances (HNS) carried on seagoing ships. This is particularly relevant given the increasing amounts of chemicals and alternative fuels being transported in bulk by sea.



There are now twelve Contracting States* to the 2010 Protocol to the HNS Convention, meeting the number of States criteria for entry into force. The treaty requires at least twelve States to express their consent to be bound by it, including four States each with not less than 2 million units of gross tonnage. Five of the eight States which had previously ratified the treaty had more than 2 million units of gross tonnage each.

The Protocol additionally requires States to submit to the IMO Secretary-General at the deposit of the instrument of ratification and annually thereafter, on or before 31 May (until the Protocol enters into force for that State), data on the total quantities of HNS contributing cargo liable for contributions received in that State during the preceding calendar year.

The 2010 HNS Protocol will enter into force 18 months after the contracting Parties have received during the preceding calendar year a total quantity of at least 40 million tonnes of cargo contributing to the HNS general account. The total quantity received by Belgium, Germany, the Kingdom of Netherlands and Sweden in 2025 is almost 28 million tonnes of HNS contributing cargo.

This means that the HNS contributing cargo data received by existing 8 contracting States in 2025 (they

received a total of more than 22 million HNS contributing cargo in 2024) will be assessed after 31 May 2026, in order to confirm the entry into force date 18 months later, i.e. 30 November 2027 the earliest.

The representatives of Belgium (His Excellency Mr. Jeroen Cooreman, Ambassador of Belgium to the UK and Permanent Representative to the IMO), Germany (Her Excellency Ms. Susanne Baumann Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Federal Republic of Germany to the United Kingdom and Permanent Representative to the IMO), the Kingdom of the Netherlands (Her Excellency Ms. Annemijn van den Broek, Deputy Head of mission of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to the United Kingdom) and Sweden (His Excellency Mr. Stefan Gullgren, Ambassador of Sweden to the United Kingdom) deposited their instruments of ratification on the sidelines of the IMO Legal Committee, which is meeting for its 113th session (13-17 April).



On 14 April at IMO HQ Secretary-General Arsenio Dominguez addressed delegates at the deposit of instruments of ratification of the 2010 HNS Convention.

The deposits were welcomed by IMO Secretary-General Arsenio Dominguez and Director of the International Oil Pollution Compensation Funds (IOPC) Gaute Sivertsen.

2010 HNS Convention regime

When in force, the 2010 HNS Convention will provide a regime of liability and compensation for damage caused by HNS cargoes transported by sea, including oil and chemicals, and covers not only pollution damage, but also the risks of fire and explosion, including loss of life or personal injury as well as loss of or damage to property.

The 2010 HNS Convention establishes the principle that the 'polluter pays' by ensuring that the shipping and HNS industries provide compensation for those who have suffered loss or damage resulting from an HNS incident. An HNS Fund will be established, to pay compensation once shipowner's liability is exhausted. This Fund will be financed through contributions paid post incident by receivers of HNS cargoes

The 2010 HNS Convention complements existing regimes already in force for the transport of oil as cargo, bunker oil used for the operation and propulsion of ships, the removal of hazardous wrecks and claims for death of or personal injury to passengers, or for damage to their luggage, on ships.

Total compensation available under the HNS Convention will be capped at 250 million Special Drawing Rights (SDR) of the International Monetary Fund (approximately USD \$360 million at current exchange rates) per event. Shipowners are held strictly liable up to a maximum limit of liability established by the Convention for the cost of an HNS incident. Registered owners of ships carrying HNS cargoes have to maintain insurance that is State certified. The HNS Fund will pay compensation once shipowner's liability is exhausted and is financed through contributions paid post incident by receivers of HNS cargoes.

The HNS Fund will be administered by States and contributions will be based on the actual need for compensation.

HNS covered by the Convention include: oils; other liquid substances defined as noxious or dangerous; liquefied gases; liquid substances with a flashpoint not exceeding 60°C; dangerous, hazardous and harmful materials and substances carried in packaged form or in containers; and solid bulk materials defined as possessing chemical hazards.

It is estimated that delegates at the some 65.000 ships will require the HNS certificates of insurance or other financial security.

*2010 HNS Convention: 12 Contracting States as at 14 April 2026: Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Estonia, Germany, France, the Kingdom of the Netherlands, Norway, Slovakia, South Africa, Sweden, Türkiye.

France – United Kingdom Strait of Hormuz summit

17 April 2026

On 17 April France and the United Kingdom convened 51 countries for an international summit on the Strait of Hormuz.

The meeting underlined the determination of the international community to support freedom of navigation, to stand up for international law, and to protect global economic stability and energy security.

A Joint Statement by President Macron and Prime Minister Starmer, Co-chairs of the International Summit, appears below:

'First, we called for the unconditional, unrestricted, and immediate re-opening of the Strait of Hormuz. The right of transit passage without restrictions or tolls is the bedrock of international trade. Freedom of navigation means navigation must be free. We

therefore welcome the announcement today that the Strait will re-open and underline that this must endure. The disruption to global energy security, supply chains, and economic and financial stability must end, for the benefit of communities right across the world, in particular for the poorest and most vulnerable. We committed to coordinating our economic responses and to avoid protectionist actions.

‘Second, we confirmed our support for the vital work of the International Maritime Organization to ensure the safety of seafarers and vessels. We will continue to work with the shipping industry to ensure that they can resume operations as soon as conditions permit, including through engagement with shipping operators, insurers, and industry bodies.

‘Third, France and the United Kingdom confirmed that they are establishing an independent and strictly defensive multinational mission to protect merchant vessels, reassure commercial shipping operators, and conduct mine clearance operations as soon as conditions permit following a sustainable ceasefire agreement.

‘The international mission will be strictly defensive, and will operate in full accordance with international law and in consultation with relevant states. We are grateful to those nations that have indicated their readiness to contribute in compliance with their constitutional procedures, whether through military assets, logistical support, financial contributions or political solidarity, and call on all countries with an interest in the free flow of global trade to express their support for this initiative.

‘The UK and France will jointly take forward this initiative, including coordinating military planning with contributing nations. The UK will host the next Leaders’ meeting in this format.’

Accord with the statement

Following publication of the accord the Governments of Belgium, Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Somalia, Sweden, confirmed that they also joined this joint leaders’ statement.

IMO Secretary-General statement to the France-UK Summit on

Freedom of Navigation in the Strait of Hormuz

The following keynote remarks were made by IMO Secretary-General Arsenio Dominguez on 17 April 2026

‘Excellencies, Mr. President and Mr. Prime Minister,

‘I would like to start by sincerely thanking you for this initiative, for your leadership, and for your engagement with the International Maritime Organization.

‘The geopolitical conflict around the Strait of Hormuz is having a very negative effect on seafarers and shipping, and on the global population and economy.

‘Approximately, 20,000 innocent seafarers and nearly 2,000 vessels remained trapped in the Persian Gulf. Any disruption to shipping represents a global interference to energy and food security.



‘The principle of freedom of navigation is not negotiable.

‘In accordance with the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and customary international law:

- Straits used for international navigation cannot be closed by bordering States.
- Equally, there is no legal basis for any country to introduce payments or impose tolls, fees, or discriminatory conditions on straits.

‘Any deviation, from these well-established and recognized principles would set a negative precedent and severely undermine the integrity and stability of shipping operations worldwide.

‘Since 1968, the International Maritime Organization has established a traffic separation scheme or maritime corridor, in the Strait of Hormuz.

‘This maritime corridor, jointly operated between Oman and Iran, has ensured safe navigation for decades. This is a mandatory mechanism in accordance with the IMO Safety of Life and Sea rules. Both countries are signatories to this Convention.

‘Our main concern remains the safety and the well-being of the innocent seafarers trapped in the Gulf due to the conflict.

‘Following the IMO Council decision, I have begun the development of an evacuation framework, using the existing traffic separation scheme, to securely evacuate ships and seafarers from the conflict zone provided it is safe to do so. The technical and operational developments are being carried out with the involvement of the regional countries, including Iran, and with the support from relevant countries assisting in the negotiations. As an Organization, we are ready to implement this framework without delay.

‘In this respect, I call upon your support to intensify the diplomatic work and engagement with IMO and the United Nations as a whole to, in particular to:

- Uphold the principle of freedom of navigation.
- Reject an imposition of tolls, fees or discriminatory transit measures for the passage through a strait used for international navigation.
- Support the IMO's plan to facilitate the evacuation of affected seafarers.
- At the appropriate time, assist with the clearance of any hazards to the commercial ships navigating in the Strait of Hormuz, including mines.
- Provide any technical and operational civilian assistance to operationalize the evacuation framework.
- Ensure practical assurances to the shipping sector, including access to insurance at reasonable costs, to enable the resumption of normal operations as soon as practicably possible.

'I would like to close by appreciating the support provided by the countries in the region in delivering essential supplies to seafarers in the Persian Gulf, safeguarding their well-being and to continue to do so, and also to facilitate crew changes when safe and possible.'

'Shipping and seafarers should never be used as leverage in geopolitical conflicts.'

'Thank you.'

IMO approves new guidelines on ship registration

The IMO's Legal Committee, LEG 113 which sat from 13 to 17 April has approved a new set of guidelines to improve transparency and due diligence in ship registration, as well as prevent fraudulent registrations and misuse of flags. This was reported by IMO on 17 April.

The guidelines help to close a key regulatory gap for the maritime industry, given there is currently no binding international framework to regulate the registration of ships.

The newly approved Guidelines will assist new and existing flag State ship registries by providing practical measures to strengthen verification and due diligence, ensure accurate ownership records, and improve oversight of registration procedures.

Welcome step

Closing the 113th session of the Legal Committee on 17 April IMO Secretary-General Mr Arsenio Dominguez said: *'This is a welcome step towards ensuring due diligence in ship registration systems for the benefit of safety, protection of the marine environment and the well-being of seafarers, essential for the safety and security of international shipping. The Guidelines will also aid in eliminating cases of fraudulent registration.'*

False flags

The Legal Committee noted that the number of ships flying a false flag had increased since the previous session in 2025, with 529 ships falsely flying the flag of a country in the past year. Nearly 40 Member States had seen cases of their flags being fraudulently used by criminal groups without their knowledge or consent.

The Guidelines focus on:

- Legislation governance and control on who can perform registration of ships.
- Procedures for quality assurance in ship registration.
- Due diligence on ownership and ship identification.
- Due diligence on ship identity and eligibility checks.
- Information sources and information sharing.

The Committee also took decisions on the following issues:

Substandard shipping

The Committee re-established a correspondence group to continue working on the Regulatory Scoping Exercise to review IMO conventions and other tools available to Member States, with the aim of developing actions to prevent unlawful operations, including substandard shipping. The correspondence group will develop terms of reference for a working group to be convened at the next session to focus on the issue.

Strait of Hormuz

The Committee strongly condemned the threats and attacks against vessels in the Arabian Sea, Sea of Oman and the Gulf Region, particularly in and around the Strait of Hormuz.



IMO's Legal Committee (LEG113) met from 13 to 17 April 2026 at IMO HQ in London.

The Committee strongly condemned the Islamic Republic of Iran's threats related to the laying of mines in and around the Strait of Hormuz, in particular the Traffic Separation Scheme (TSS). It further condemned the reported toll system for vessels passing through the Strait of Hormuz and the discriminatory measures imposed by the Islamic Republic of Iran, which were contrary to the purposes of IMO.

The Committee affirmed that the Islamic Republic of Iran's actions were contrary to the right of transit passage, which must not be impeded, through the Strait of Hormuz in accordance with international law.

Fair treatment of seafarers

The Committee noted with alarm that from 1 January to 31 December 2025, a total number of 410 new cases had been reported on the joint IMO/ILO database on seafarer abandonment, affecting more than 6,000 seafarers. These figures excessively surpass all the previous years' record of reported cases. In 185 reported cases, there was no obligatory financial guarantee.

In addition, from 1 January 2026 a further 103 abandonment cases have already been recorded on the joint ILO/IMO database.

Maritime Labour Convention

The Committee urged Member States to ratify the Maritime Labour Convention, 2006, including its 2014 amendments, and to apply the 2022 joint ILO/IMO Guidelines on how to deal with seafarer abandonment cases. It stressed that port, coastal and flag States must take seafarers' rights seriously and cooperate with other stakeholders to resolve cases.

With regards to the ILO/IMO abandonment database, the Committee requested the Joint ILO/IMO Tripartite Working Group (JTWG) to consider creating a clear step-by-step guide (Standard Operating Procedure) with specific timelines and trigger dates, so authorities know exactly when and how to act quickly in urgent abandonment cases. It should not create extra administrative burden.

It asked the Task Force to recommend means to enhance the accuracy and verification of financial security documentation, through a secure reporting interface within IMO's existing systems.

Liability and compensation regime related to alternative fuels

The Committee agreed that a regulatory gap existed in relation to liability and compensation for incidents involving alternative fuels used for ship propulsion and that existing international liability regimes do not adequately address the specific risks of these fuels - this gap must be addressed to ensure legal certainty and effective compensation for victims.

The Committee agreed there is a need to develop a dedicated regime, or amend existing ones, to ensure that their use in ship operation and propulsion is adequately covered. It established a correspondence group to continue the work on this matter and report back to the next session.

A full meeting summary will be published in due course, it is understood.

Eastern and Southern Africa

Accelerating maritime digitalization

On 24 April it was announced from HQ that IMO, the Africa Transport Policy Program (SSATP), and the World Bank, in partnership with the United Republic of Tanzania's Ministry of Transport, had convened a regional workshop in Dar es Salaam to accelerate the digitalization of ports across twelve African countries.



Opened by Minister of Transport Hon Professor Makame Mbarawa, MP, the event was held from 20 to 24 April and aimed to:

- Promote the adoption of the IMO Compendium on Facilitation and Electronic Business which sets out how shipping and port data is structured and shared electronically to streamline communication.
- Scale up implementation of Maritime Single Windows (MSW) and Port Community Systems (PCS), which are integrated digital platforms that streamline vessel and cargo clearance, reduce bureaucratic delays, and strengthen Africa's competitiveness in global maritime trade.

Regional collaboration strengthened

The workshop convened regional and international institutions committed to translating policy into action, including the Port Management Association of Eastern & Southern Africa (PMAESA), the African Development Bank (AfDB), the African Harbour Masters' Committee (AHMC), the African Alliance for Electronic Commerce (AAEC).

Broad representation

More than 100 participants, including 36 women, from maritime administrations, port authorities, and customs authorities from Angola, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Seychelles, Somalia, South Africa, and the United Republic of Tanzania, took part in knowledge-sharing and practical capacity building.

Recommendations

Sessions highlighted the strategic benefits of MSWs and the need for alignment with the IMO Compendium, drawing on IMO needs assessments conducted in the region which have identified challenges and provided recommendations for MSW deployment. Participating countries presented their current port systems, enabling peer learning on progress, challenges and opportunities.

A regional trade facilitation ecosystem

The workshop examined Port Community Systems and explore potential synergies with MSWs. A central premise of the workshop was that MSW systems are not standalone digital solutions, but core elements of a broader, regionally harmonized trade facilitation ecosystem.

By deepening participants' understanding of the FAL Convention, strengthening coordination among port stakeholders, and clarifying the financing and policy requirements for MSW implementation, the workshop helped to equip countries with the practical knowledge needed to accelerate MSW deployment.

IAPH-World Bank study

The workshop drew on a previous IAPH-World Bank Study of 2024 here *Port Community Systems: Lessons from Global Experience**.

Aligned with SSATP's Strategic Agenda

This workshop built on a first regional session held in Abidjan in December 2025. The initiative aligns with SSATP's Fourth Development Plan (DP4), which prioritizes digitalization of transport and trade corridors across Africa. MSW systems are widely recognized as key to reducing logistics costs, improving efficiency and strengthening port competitiveness.

SSATP's role in the workshop includes alignment and harmonization of MSW initiatives across countries, as well as presenting areas for continued support and targeted technical assistance.

IMO's ITCP

The workshop was delivered under IMO's Integrated Technical Cooperation Programme (ITCP) with financial support from China, alongside World Bank funding through the Korea World Bank Partnership Facility and support from Tanzania's Ministry of Transport. The initiative builds on recent analytical work emphasizing that effective port digitalization requires not only technology, but also legal frameworks, institutional capacity and coordinated stakeholder engagement.

*available here: <https://tinyurl.com/4bkef4ms>

IMO Legal Committee (LEG 113)

Extract from closing remarks by IMO Secretary-General Mr Arsenio Dominguez delivered on 17 April 2026

'We have come to the end of the 113th session of the Legal Committee and I would like to acknowledge a few important matters you have addressed this week.'

'Firstly, the well-being of seafarers continues to be of great concern to me and to the entire Membership of the Organization. The Committee has demonstrated its continuous commitment to addressing the issue of abandonment of seafarers, and unfair criminalization of these workers which we must all pursue to eliminate.'

'Ensuring due diligence in ship registration system for the benefit of safety, protection of the marine environment and the well-being of seafarers, thereby eliminating cases of fraudulent registration, is of paramount importance. You have taken the first steps in approving guidelines for the registration of ships to ensure it is modern, effective and transparent.'

'You also identified a gap in the IMO liability and compensation framework with respect to damage caused by alternative fuels, and agreed on the need to develop a dedicated regime, or amend existing ones, to ensure that their use in ship operation and propulsion is adequately covered. This is timely and essential as the maritime industry continues to evolve.'

'I would like to express my sincere appreciation to your Chair, Mr. Diego Ramirez of Marshall Islands for your skill and dedication with which you have led this session.'

Trapped in the Persian Gulf

Seafarer shares first-hand account with IMO about being stranded in the Persian Gulf.

On 24 April IMO Secretary-General Arsenio Dominguez called on all Member States to support efforts to address the situation in the Strait of Hormuz, where around 20,000 seafarers remain trapped and unable to leave.



In an informal briefing to Member States and industry representatives, Secretary-General Dominguez

confirmed that several vessels had been seized and detained in the region over the previous few days.

He urged maximum caution, considering potential mines present throughout the Strait and threat of further attacks on ships.

Furthermore he commented: *My call is to release the seafarers because they are not at fault. The situation is not improving. I reiterate: there is no safe transit anywhere in the Strait of Hormuz.*

He highlighted that 29 attacks on vessels in the Persian Gulf and around the Strait of Hormuz had been verified by IMO since the beginning of the conflict, resulting in the death of at least ten seafarers and damage to the vessels.

Around 20,000 seafarers on around 1,600 vessels remain in the Gulf, as at 24 April.

Delegates were informed: *'I spoke to a seafarer who had been trapped in the Persian Gulf for more than six weeks. Aside from the exhaustion and toll on mental health of the crews, they feel invisible, that they are not valued. There is much more we need to do.'**

For more information related to shipping and seafarers in the Strait of Hormuz and the Middle East readers are invited to use the link here: <https://tinyurl.com/29crfdx6>

*The video showing the IMO Secretary-General introducing the seafarer's first-hand account is to be found on the IMO YouTube channel available with the link here: <https://tinyurl.com/2kyp3v8k>

IMO S-G at the UN

High-Level Open Debate

IMO Secretary-General Mr Arsenio Dominguez has called on States to uphold the principle of freedom of navigation and reject any imposition of tolls, fees or discriminatory transit measures for passage through straits used for international navigation.

Addressing the UN Security Council on 27 April on the topic of ***The safety and protection of waterways in the maritime domain***, he emphasized: *'The principle of freedom of navigation is not negotiable. Ships must be allowed to trade worldwide unhindered and in accordance with international law.'*

Any deviation from these well-established and recognized principles would set a negative precedent and severely undermine the integrity and stability of shipping operations worldwide, he added.

He urged States to support the IMO's plan to facilitate the evacuation of affected seafarers and, at the appropriate time, to assist with the clearance of any hazards to the commercial ships navigating in the Strait of Hormuz, including mines.

The Secretary-General's statement to UN Security Council High-Level Open Debate appears opposite:

The Safety and Protection of Waterways in the Maritime Domain

Agenda item "Maintenance of international peace and security"

'Thank you, Mr. President and distinguished members of the United Nations Security Council.

'Since the 1980s, IMO has been addressing maritime security in the shipping and port sector and has in place the relevant mandatory standards to enhance global maritime security. Our regulatory process is constantly evolving to adapt to any new threats and make use of our experience and expertise.

'The geopolitical conflict around the Strait of Hormuz is having a very negative effect on seafarers and shipping, and on the global population and economy.

'Approximately, 20,000 innocent seafarers and nearly 2,000 vessels remained trapped in the Persian Gulf. Any disruption to shipping represents a global interference to energy and food security.

'The principle of freedom of navigation is not negotiable. Ships must be allowed to trade worldwide unhindered and in accordance with international law.

'In accordance with the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and customary international law:

- *Straits used for international navigation cannot be closed by bordering States.*
- *Equally, there is no legal basis for any country to introduce payments or impose tolls, fees or any discriminatory conditions on international straits.*

'Any deviation from these well-established and recognized principles would set a negative precedent and severely undermine the integrity and stability of shipping operations worldwide.



'Since 1968, the International Maritime Organization has established a traffic separation scheme or maritime corridor, in the Strait of Hormuz.

'This maritime corridor, jointly operated between Oman and Iran, has ensured safe navigation for decades. This is a mandatory mechanism in accordance with the IMO's International Convention on the Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS).

'Both countries are signatories to this Convention, which has governed the safety of ships at sea since 1974. Our main concern remains the safety and the well-being of the innocent seafarers trapped in the Gulf, due to the conflict.'

'Following the IMO Council decision, I have begun the development of an evacuation framework, using the existing traffic separation scheme, to securely evacuate ships and seafarers from the conflict zone provided it is safe to do so.'

'The technical and operational developments are being carried out with the involvement of the regional countries, including Iran, and with the support from relevant countries assisting in the negotiations.'

'As an Organization, we are ready to implement this framework without delay, but only once it is safe to do so.'

'In this respect, I call upon States to uphold the principle of freedom of navigation; and reject an imposition of tolls, fees or discriminatory transit measures for the passage through a strait used for international navigation.'

'I would like to take this opportunity to request States to:

- *Support the IMO's plan to facilitate the evacuation of affected seafarers;*
- *At the appropriate time, to assist with the clearance of any hazards to the commercial ships navigating in the Strait of Hormuz, including mines;*
- *Provide any technical and operational civilian assistance to operationalize the evacuation framework; and*
- *Ensure practical assurances to the shipping sector, including access to insurance at reasonable costs, to enable the resumption of normal operations as soon as practicably possible.*

'I would like to reiterate my appreciation for the support provided by the countries in the region in delivering essential supplies to seafarers in the Persian Gulf, safeguarding their well-being, and request them to facilitate crew changes when safe and possible.'

'Shipping and seafarers should never be used as leverage in geopolitical conflicts.'

'I would like to join and reiterate the call for de-escalation to ensure safety of seafarers, freedom of navigation and stability of supply chains worldwide.'

'Thank you for this opportunity.'

UN Web TV

With regard to *The safety and protection of waterways in the maritime domain* UN Security Council, 10145th meeting, readers are invited to see

the High Level Open Debate (timed at 3:15:09) using the link here with UN Web TV: <https://tinyurl.com/yu6nrwp2>

The video commences at 0:20:04 and the Secretary-General of the UN and the President of the Security Council (Bahrein) speak to 0:32:10. The S-G IMO speaks from 0:32:29 to 0:37:23

Asia-Pacific Heads of Maritime Safety Agencies annual meeting

IMO provides update

IMO has updated members of the Asia and Pacific Heads of Maritime Safety Agencies (APHoMSA) on continuing regional activities, including regulatory updates, during the annual APHoMSA meeting, which took place in Honiara, Solomon Islands from 14 to 16 April.

This 25th meeting of the series brought together representatives from 20 countries and six observer organizations from across the Asia-Pacific region to discuss topics including women in maritime, safety at sea and seafarer welfare, marine environment protection, maritime incident response, and improving regional cooperation.

S-G IMO's reflections

In his opening remarks via recorded message, IMO Secretary-General Arsenio Dominguez reflected on the launch of the Regional Presence Office for the Pacific (in Fiji) as a centre of coordination, knowledge and technical expertise, directly supporting the Pacific Small Islands Developing States (SIDS) and Least Developed Countries (LDCs).

APHoMSA a critical role

The Secretary-General also highlighted the critical role of the APHoMSA in translating policy into practical action and turning global commitments into real outcomes that complement IMO's ongoing work.



IMO's Ms Jean Ver Pia, Technical Cooperation and Implementation Division, provided updates on marine

environment protection and technical cooperation support in the region.

MARPOL

This included support for the ratification and implementation of MARPOL Annex V and the London Protocol and technical cooperation support in the Asia and Pacific Islands region for regulating dumping of waste into the ocean and IMO's OceanLitter Programme.*

Key details included development of national action plans on marine plastic litter from ships; legal reforms; enhancement of port state control; and advancing expertise of the key national authorities involved in the decision making and management of sea-based marine plastic litter at a national and regional level.

IMO's ITCP

Ms Ver Pia provided an update on developments under the IMO Integrated Technical Cooperation Programme (ITCP) thematic restructuring, improvements to the TC Request Management System and the TC Dashboard, and encouraged APHOMSA Members to promote the 2026-2027 World Maritime Day Theme: ***From Policy to Practice: Powering Maritime Excellence*** in the implementation of their activities.

Respecting the rights and freedoms of navigation

In his opening remarks, the Chair, Mr Thierry Nervale, Director, Solomon Islands Maritime Authority, reflected on the Middle East crisis and the impact on the Pacific region. He invited APHoMSA members to support the call of IMO Secretary-General on all Parties to respect the rights and freedoms of navigation and the paramount importance of protecting the safety and wellbeing of seafarers.

Document due

The full APHoMSA outcome statement will in due course be available here:

<https://aphomsa.org/forum-sessions/>

APHoMSA 26

The 26th session of APHoMSA will be hosted by Canada in Vancouver in 2027.

* <https://tinyurl.com/y4pmupac>

IMO progresses work: Ship emissions, pollution and ocean protection

IMO's Marine Environment Protection Committee concluded its 84th session with a commitment to rebuild consensus on global shipping emissions, while sounding the alarm over environmental risks in the Strait of Hormuz and adopting new measures to curb air pollution in the Northeast Atlantic.

Closing the meeting, held from 27 April to 1 May 2026 in London, IMO Secretary-General Arsenio

Dominguez said: *'We are back on track, but we have to rebuild trust. I encourage you to maintain this momentum through your intersessional work and to prepare submissions that can bring the membership together.'*

The Committee will resume its Second Extraordinary Session on 4 December 2026, subject to confirmation by the 85th session (MEPC 85) scheduled to convene 30 November to 3 December.

IMO Net Zero Framework

Nearly 100 delegations took the floor at MEPC 84 to voice their views on the adoption of "mid-term measures" to address greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from ships – known as the IMO Net-Zero Framework – with multiple proposals tabled on how to take forward negotiations.

The Committee agreed to establish an intersessional Working Group to resolve various concerns and drive broader convergence on a global measure ahead of MEPC 85 in six months. Member States will be able to submit new amendments and adjustments to the draft amendments previously approved.

Two inter-sessional meetings will be scheduled (from 1 to 4 September and 23 to 27 November) ahead of MEPC 85 (30 November to 3 December), as well as a one-day expert workshop on "chain of custody" models, which track fuel origin and movement of fuels across the supply chain, ensuring emissions are properly traced and verified.

The second extraordinary session of MEPC (adjourned last October) is scheduled to resume on 4 December, subject to discussions at MEPC 85.

Strait of Hormuz and the marine environment

The Committee adopted a resolution condemning the attacks on commercial shipping in the Strait of Hormuz region and the related risks of marine pollution.

The Committee recognised the vulnerability of the Persian Gulf and adjacent waters, warning that these attacks could cause large-scale marine pollution such as oil, hazardous and noxious substances and hazardous residues arising from missiles, drones, fires and explosions.

The Committee requested the Secretary-General to monitor environmental impacts and report to the next IMO Council session.

New Emission Control Area for the North-East Atlantic

The Committee adopted a new Emission Control Area (ECA) in the North-East Atlantic, introducing stricter emission limits on nitrogen oxides (NOx), sulphur oxides (SOx) and particulate matter (PM). The entry into force date is set for 1 September 2027, with the ECA taking effect 12 months later in 2028.

The ECA covers the exclusive economic zones and territorial seas, extending up to 200 nautical miles from their baselines of Greenland, Iceland, the Faroes, Ireland, the mainlands of the United Kingdom, France, Spain and Portugal.

Within ECAs, ships must use fuel with a sulphur content of no more than 0.10%. Cutting SOx and NOx emissions reduces risks of lung cancer, cardiovascular disease, strokes and childhood asthma. It also improves visibility at sea and reduces acidification, helping protect crops and forests.

2026 Strategy and Action Plan on marine plastic litter

The Committee adopted the 2026 Strategy and the Action Plan to Address Marine Plastic Litter from Ships, reaffirming IMO's goal of zero plastic waste discharges to sea from ships by 2030.

The Strategy and Action Plan work to improve port reception facilities and waste processing, strengthening regulatory compliance, and expands public awareness and seafarer training, and international cooperation, including targeted technical assistance and capacity-building. It updates and supersedes the 2021 Strategy and 2025 Action Plan for addressing marine litter.

Developing a Code for transporting plastic pellets

The Committee agreed to develop a mandatory code governing the maritime transport of plastic pellets in freight containers, under MARPOL Annex III and/or the SOLAS Convention. The Sub-Committee on Pollution Prevention and Response (PPR 14) was tasked with drafting the code and reporting back to MEPC.

Actions on fishing gear marking

The Committee approved a circular promoting the implementation of fishing gear marking systems, in line with the FAO Voluntary Guidelines on the Marking of Fishing Gear (VGMFG).

Combatting harmful aquatic organisms in ballast water

The Committee approved a package of amendments to the Ballast Water Management (BWM) Convention, following a review of the treaty and its associated instruments under an experience-building phase (EBP).

The reviewed was conducted to refine implementation, close regulatory gaps and ensure the Contention remains an effective and practical tool for protecting marine ecosystems. The amendments cover various mandatory provisions of the Convention (regulations and appendices in the Annex to the Convention).

The Committee adopted revised Guidelines for ballast water management and development of Ballast Water Management Plans (G4).

Reduction of underwater radiated noise from shipping

The Committee advanced its work on underwater radiated noise (URN), agreeing in principle to extend the experience-building phase (EBP) by two years, to the end of 2028. The EBP aims to address barriers Member States face in applying IMO's URN Guidelines (Revised guidelines for the reduction of underwater radiated noise from shipping to address adverse impacts on marine life - MEPC.1/Circ.906/Rev.1)

The Committee agreed in principle to commission an IMO study on URN emissions, as an evidence base for possible future measures. Member States were also invited to submit proposals for a URN policy roadmap to MEPC 85.

New outputs

The Committee agreed on three new outputs to work on over the next two years:

- Amendments to regulation 12 of MARPOL Annex VI to prohibit the reintroduction of ozone-depleting substances on ships; and
- Measures to address maritime autonomous surface ships (MASS) in the instruments under the purview of the Marine Environment Protection Committee.

A new output on *Supporting the implementation of the BBNJ Agreement within IMO's regulatory framework for protecting the seas and oceans and marine biodiversity* was agreed in principle, subject to further consideration by MEPC 85.

Other key decisions

The Committee also took action on the following:

- Approved the Terms of Reference for the Fifth IMO GHG Study and requested the IMO Secretariat to initiate the procurement process for the study.
- Adopted 2026 Guidelines for test bed and onboard measurements of CH₄ and/or N₂O emissions from marine diesel engines.
- Approved draft amendments to the 2008 NOx Technical Code in relation to non-carbon containing fuels, with a view to subsequent adoption.
- Agreed that a standalone legally binding instrument should be developed for the control and management of ships' biofouling to minimize the transfer of invasive aquatic species.

A full meeting summary will be available in due course.

Engine room fire

Summary

On 4 January 2025 at about 2323 local time, the bulk cargo vessel *Lem Verbena*

(Marshall Islands-flag, built 2020, 655ft loa, 36,781gt) was docked at the Alabama State Docks on the Mobile River in Mobile, Alabama, with nineteen crewmembers on board when a fire started in the engine room.

The crew activated the vessel's carbon dioxide fixed fire extinguishing system. Shoreside firefighters later determined the fire had been extinguished. There were no injuries, and no pollution was reported.

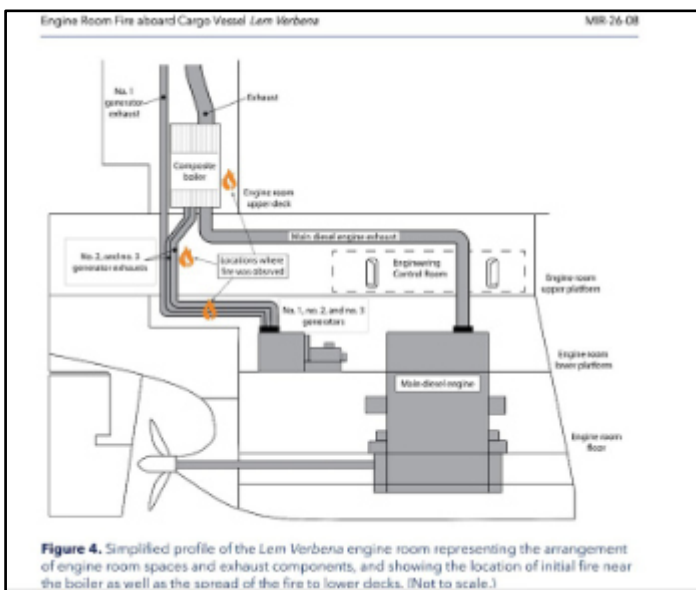
Damage to the vessel was estimated at \$5.5 million.

Details

The US National Transport Safety Board (NTSB) determined that the probable cause of the fire on the bulk carrier was the failure of an O-ring seal on the composite boiler burner unit oil fittings block due to the radial misalignment of the two fuel ports on the block modules, causing pressurized diesel fuel to atomize and ignite on a nearby hot surface.

Event Sequence

On 4 January 2025, about 0040, *Lem Verbena* arrived at the Alabama State Docks, pier D, on the Mobile River in Mobile, Alabama. At 0900, offloading operations began in cargo hold no. 3, which contained pig iron. Cargo operations continued throughout the day. Late that evening, about 2250, the second and third engineers remotely started the no. 3 generator from the ECR to support cargo operations. (The no. 2 generator was already online supplying electrical power to the vessel, and the no. 1 generator was not running.)



About 2300, the third engineer conducted a round of the upper engine room and the second engineer conducted a round of the lower engine room. During his round, the third engineer noted that the composite boiler burner unit was running at the time (the burner unit was actively firing into the boiler's furnace) and that there were no issues. The boiler was producing steam for heating the main engine and heavy fuel oil (HFO) tanks, and cleaning HFO tanks. After completing the round, the third engineer departed the engine room, and the second 2A composite boiler burner unit uses a combination of a fuel-fired burner unit and diesel engine exhaust gas to produce steam used for auxiliary purposes on board a vessel.

The second engineer went back to the ECR. At 2305, the second engineer stopped the no. 3 generator from the ECR.

At 2316, cargo operations were completed. The boiler logs showed that, about a minute later, at 2317, the boiler burner unit cycled off with no issues.

At 2322:41, a fire alarm activated in the ECR; the alarm indicated a fire in the "upper engine room" zone, where the boiler and the incinerator were located. At 2322:58, the vessel's water mist system sensed smoke/heat in the upper engine room zone and automatically deployed in the space (see section 1.3.3). Upon activation of the fire alarm, the second engineer exited the ECR and observed ignited fuel "dropping down" from the engine room upper deck where the boiler burner unit was located, spreading the fire down to the engine room upper and lower platforms beneath it. The second engineer returned to the ECR and called the chief engineer.

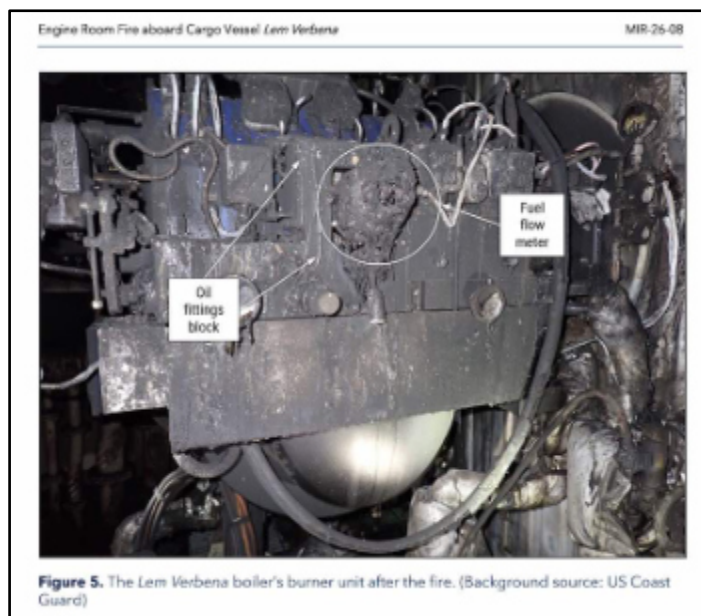
After notifying the chief engineer, the second engineer evacuated the ECR via an emergency escape hatch leading to the main deck. On the main deck, he met the chief and third engineers at a fire control station just outside of the entrance to the engine room, where they shut off electrical power to the fuel pumps for the main engine and generators. They also closed the engine room ventilation and dampers. Shortly afterward, the no. 2 generator shut down. The emergency diesel generator automatically started, came online, and provided power to emergency equipment (such as emergency lighting and the emergency fire pump).

The chief engineer notified the master of the fire, and at 2328, the master sounded the general alarm from the bridge. Upon hearing the general alarm, the chief mate directed the crew to muster. The crew's typical muster point was on the port side of the vessel; however, the chief mate had crewmembers muster on the starboard side to allow for an easier evacuation if necessary (the vessel was starboard side to the pier). At 2330, all crew were accounted for, and they prepared fire hoses and began boundary cooling the space. The master observed increasing smoke coming from the funnel during this time and used the vessel's satellite phone to notify the Mobile Fire-Rescue Department.

At 2334, the chief mate and an able seafarer (AB) donned firefighter outfits with self-contained breathing

apparatus and prepared to enter the engine room upper deck through an external door. The chief mate noted that the door was hot, and upon entering the engine room, the chief mate and the AB encountered heat and heavy smoke, which limited their visibility. After about 30 seconds, they evacuated the space. They attempted to enter a second time but evacuated again due to the heat and smoke, and secured the door to the space. The chief mate later recalled that he did not see a fire but observed “some water drops falling” in the space. During this time, the master recalled that “smoke erupted from the funnel

At 2340, due to the severity of the fire, the master decided to release the vessel’s carbon dioxide (CO₂) fixed fire extinguishing system. A second muster was performed to account for all crew before the release. With all crew accounted for, the chief and second engineers went to the CO₂ room and released (CO₂) into the engine room. The master noted that after the (CO₂) was released, the smoke from the exhaust stacks dissipated.



About 2350, shoreside firefighters arrived on board and met with the chief mate to review the fire control plan and engine room layout. The crew advised the firefighters that CO₂ from the fixed fire extinguishing system had been released into the engine room. Shoreside firefighters did not immediately enter the space and allowed a “soak time” for the deployed CO₂ while they monitored the temperature of the surrounding bulkheads.⁴ During this time, the crew continued boundary cooling.

At 0012, on 5 January the shoreside firefighters, the chief mate, and an AB all donned self-contained breathing apparatus, entered the engine room, and went to the upper deck and upper platform. The firefighters observed “several piles of wood and fuel oil” but could not immediately determine an ignition source.

At 0037, the firefighters determined that the fire was extinguished. A fire watch was posted, and the crew began to ventilate the engine room. During this time, shoreside firefighters remained on board to monitor the space for a potential reflash.

The fire did not reflash, and the fire department confirmed that the fire had been extinguished. The firefighters departed the vessel at 0145. Later that morning, the chief engineer donned a self-contained breathing apparatus and entered the engine room. Using a gas detector, he confirmed that the space was safe for entry and started the no. 1 generator (the exhaust for the no. 1 generator was not routed through the boiler, which remained shut down. An initial assessment by the chief engineer found that the fire started near the fuel flow meter on the boiler’s burner unit.

Additional Information

Damage and Post-fire Survey

After the fire, a surveyor from the vessel’s classification society completed a damage survey. The survey report noted extensive fire damage to the boiler’s burner unit and adjacent burner control cabinet. The surrounding lights, electrical cabling, alarm light towers, piping and bulkhead insulation, fire alarm pull stations, general alarm horns, and fire doors in the engine room upper deck were also damaged by smoke and heat from the fire.

The surveyor observed the most severe fire damage on the fuel-handling side of the burner unit, which included the fuel flow meter and the oil fittings block. The other side of the burner unit was less severely damaged but showed heavy soot and signs of smoke damage. The engine room upper platform (a deck below the engine room upper deck, which contained the boiler) was also significantly damaged by the fire. A wooden supply shelf located directly below the burner unit through the metal grating of the engine room upper deck was destroyed by the fire, and fuel oil was observed on the deck below. Total damages were estimated at \$5.5 million.

The boiler

Lem Verbena’s boiler created steam using two methods: a furnace heated by a burner unit fired from diesel oil, and waste heat from the main engine or the no. 2 and no. 3 diesel generator exhausts, which ran through vertical tubes within the boiler (the no. 1 diesel generator was not part of the boiler system). A portion of the no. 2 and no. 3 generator exhaust pipes ran directly below the burner unit in the engine room upper platform and through metal grating before it entered the boiler.

On the night of the fire, the burner unit was in automatic mode and configured to use marine gas oil (MGO) (the burner unit could run on either HFO or MGO). About the time of the fire, the no. 2 generator was online, and its exhaust was routed into the boiler. The boiler logs showed that the burner unit typically cycled on for about 28 minutes before shutting down for about 20 minutes. According to the burner unit manufacturer, when operated in automatic mode, the burner unit’s fuel pump was designed to shut off in between cycles when it was not actively firing into the boiler. When the fire alarm activated, the burner unit was not actively firing and had completed a cycle about 5 minutes before the activation of the alarm.

Maintenance

The vessel's planned maintenance system outlined all recurring maintenance tasks for the boiler and its burner unit. The third engineer was primarily responsible for all maintenance tasks on the boiler. All daily, weekly, and monthly maintenance tasks had been completed with no issues noted. Safety rounds, or visual checks, of the boiler space were also performed 5–6 times per day by the crewmember on watch and involved checking boiler pressure, checking for water leaks, and recording water level. Additionally, in accordance with guidance from the boiler manufacturer, quarterly maintenance and inspection tasks for the burner unit were completed by the ship's crew on 17 November 2024 (about two months before the fire), with no issues noted.

Post-casualty examinations

Following the fire, a service technician from the boiler manufacturer examined the boiler. The technician found no internal or structural damage to the boiler (aside from smoke and heat damage to the exterior of the boiler) and successfully pressure-tested the unit. However, the technician determined that the burner unit was damaged beyond repair and required replacement. The service technician's report concluded that the concentration of damage on the fuel-handling side of the burner unit indicated possible fuel contamination or a sudden fuel leak. The report also stated that the burner unit was not properly tightened to the boiler's combustion chamber, citing "an observable gap between [the] air housing and burner."

US Coast Guard investigators disassembled and examined the burner unit's oil fittings block around the fuel flow meter. The oil fittings block was comprised of three separate modules that provided a path for pressurized fuel from the fuel pump, through the fuel flow meter and other components, and into the igniter. Investigators found that an O-ring between two of the modules overlapped into the corresponding fuel port and become pinched between the two modules. When the fuel pump was running, fuel pressure at this location in the system was 3 bar, or about 43 pounds per square inch. Coast Guard investigators also found that the bolt securing the burner unit to the boiler combustion chamber was partially stripped, preventing the burner from being tightly secured to the boiler.

In the months after the fire, the *Lem Verbena* operating company replaced the burner unit with the same model that was destroyed by the fire. When installing the new burner unit, the new unit's SD card was inoperable, so the service technician used the undamaged SD card from the previous burner unit that was involved in the fire (the boiler's SD card stored operational data and contained software controlling the operation of the boiler and burner unit). During initial testing, the MGO fuel pump did not turn off when the burner unit shut down between cycles. (According to the burner unit manufacturer, as designed, the fuel pump should only run when the burner unit was running, and the pump should turn off when the burner unit was off in between cycles.) To

correct this issue, the service technician modified the software configuration file on the SD card so that the MGO fuel pump stopped when the burner was off.

The operating company determined that the pinched O-ring was subject to accelerated degradation due to a combination of becoming pinched between the two modules and continuous exposure to hot, pressurized fuel in the system because of a software settings error on the system's SD card. The company concluded that the fire started from an "exploding leakage" from the weak point in the system created by the degraded and pinched O-ring. Investigators could not determine whether the block modules had been disassembled since they were manufactured or initially installed on the vessel.

Water mist System

According to the alarm log, about thirteen seconds after the fire alarm activated, the water mist system automatically deployed in the zone for the engine room upper deck containing the boiler and the incinerator.

The water mist system near the boiler was tested monthly by the *Lem Verbena* crew, with the last test occurring the day before the fire. No issues were noted; the system was found in "good working condition," and the "water pressure was in working range."

After the fire was extinguished, the chief engineer noted that there was water in the space containing the boiler. He believed that this water was from the water mist system because the fire team that entered the space did not discharge any hoses in the space.

Analysis

While the bulk cargo vessel *Lem Verbena* was docked at the Alabama State Docks in Mobile, Alabama, a fire broke out in the upper deck of the engine room near the boiler. Due to the severity of the fire, the crew activated the vessel's CO2 fixed fire extinguishing system, and the fire was extinguished.

After the fire, the *Lem Verbena* operating company and Coast Guard investigators found that an O-ring on the oil fittings block upper module of the boiler's burner unit had become pinched on the fuel port for the lower module. This O-ring was intended to provide a seal between the corresponding fuel ports on the lower and upper modules (when bolted together) to contain pressurized fuel as it moved through the system to the burner unit igniter. O-rings are designed to protect against leaks by lying flat and becoming compressed between two machinery surfaces that are secured together, typically containing a material under pressure. If any portion of the O-ring does not lay flat between the two surfaces, full compression of the O-ring cannot be achieved. This weakens the seal created by the O-ring and increases the likelihood of failure. In this case, a portion of the O-ring on the upper module overlapped into the fuel port on the lower module, preventing the O-ring from lying flat and providing an adequate seal. This was because the two modules' ports were not aligned radially and created

an uneven clearance gap when the ports were bolted together. This gap could not be seen or detected when the ports were bolted together. (Investigators could not determine whether the block modules had been disassembled since they were manufactured or initially installed on the vessel.)

Additionally, because of a software settings error discovered on the boiler unit's SD card, the fuel pump did not shut down between cycles as intended and the pinched O-ring was exposed to constant pressure. The operating company found that the O-ring's exposure to hot, pressurized fuel caused accelerated degradation of the O-ring, ultimately causing the seal to fail. Over time, the pinched portion of the O-ring was weakened until its seal failed under the fuel pressure in the ports. Because the fuel pump remained running even if the boiler burner was not firing and, thus, the fuel system was always pressurized, pressurized fuel about 43 pounds per square inch would have atomized around the boiler and ignited on a nearby hot surface, causing the fire.

Due to a lack of evidence, the exact ignition source and sequence (what caused the ignition and how the fire spread) could not be determined. However, post-fire damage assessments showed the most significant fire damage on the fuel-handling side of the burner unit and the immediately adjacent area. Significant fire damage was also found in the engine room upper platform, a deck below the boiler. Possible ignition sources in those areas included the boiler and burner unit, which may have still been hot from a previous cycle (completed about five minutes before the fire), or the running no. 2 generator's exhaust, which ran into the boiler from directly below it. While the exhaust was covered with protective lagging, it is possible that the atomized fuel contacted an unprotected section of the exhaust pipe and ignited.

The water mist system around the boiler automatically activated and discharged (based on water found in the engine room post-fire), but it did not extinguish the fire. The crew attempted to enter the engine room but were unable to do so because of the high heat and smoke from the fire. Because the crew had secured the engine room, shut off ventilation, stopped the fuel pumps, and all crew were mustered, the master was able to make a quick decision to activate the CO₂ fixed fire extinguishing system and notify shoreside firefighters when it became clear that the crew was unable to fight the fire. When shoreside firefighters arrived on board, they coordinated with the ship's crew to determine the status of onboard efforts to suppress the fire, including the crew's securement of ventilation and fuel, muster of the crew, and deployment of CO₂ in the engine room. Because of their effective communication, shoreside firefighters decided not to immediately enter the engine room, and the engine room remained sealed off. This allowed the deployed CO₂ to displace the oxygen and cool the surrounding area while the firefighters and crew monitored bulkhead temperatures and continued boundary cooling. The crew's initial response to the fire (sealing the engine room, stopping fuel pumps, and mustering the crew) and coordination with shoreside firefighters maximized the effectiveness of the CO₂ fixed fire extinguishing system.

Probable Cause

The National Transportation Safety Board determines that the probable cause of the fire on the bulk carrier Lem Verbena was the failure of an O-ring seal on the composite boiler burner unit oil fittings block due to the radial misalignment of the two fuel ports on the block modules, causing pressurized diesel fuel to atomize and ignite on a nearby hot surface.

The NTSB report

The full NTSB report is available using the link here: <https://tinyurl.com/3bdmmusx>

Editorial note:

Text and illustrations are published here by courtesy of the US National Transportation Safety Board with grateful thanks.

Innocence at stake

By Michael Grey, Honorary IFSMA Member

There are some strange and contradictory messages flying around in the barrages of invective being exchanged between the warring parties in the Middle East, many of them on the issue of passage through the dire straits of Hormuz. Tolls are being demanded by the Iranians, although only for the passage of approved ships, while an off-the-cuff remark by President Trump has hinted that he would not be averse to the US itself demanding some sort of passage fee.

The notion that an international waterway can be fenced off and innocent passage monetised like a canal must be fiercely resisted by all, as the precedent it would set in a generally unstable world would be altogether appalling. Admittedly, full-scale war inevitably overturns the "rules-based" order of navigation in peaceful times, but to contemplate any form of agreement long term, in which access to the Arabian Gulf would be subject to a passage toll, must be regarded as completely unacceptable. There are enough unstable administrations in the world which would see the idea of charging passing ships as a tremendous wheeze, which tells us that this should not be tolerated under any circumstances. There are already far too many interested parties (think of the environmental gang) which look upon the innocent passage of ships as a potential gold-mine.

This current confrontation will eventually end, but it must not impose any conditions on the passage of shipping through the straits, in which there are already clearly established routes and traffic separation zones on the Omani side. It is this system, designed with international agreement, for the safety of shipping, in congested waters, which must be restored, once the warring parties cease their hostilities. As with all such events, there are all sorts of lessons which this convulsion in world trade ought to be reinforcing, as any sensible government will surely be considering its manifold vulnerabilities. We have had, in short order, Covid, Ukraine and now the current conflict; all of

which should have been flashing red lights as regards our supply chain security, our obvious and huge weaknesses in defence and the need to practise a greater degree of self-sufficiency, in everything from energy to foodstuffs.

This instability has surely demonstrated that most of the world's conflicts are interconnected in some way, and however remote, affect us all, whether in the interruption of commodities we depend upon, like energy or fertilisers, or in the following tide of refugees, which eventually wash up on our shores. The Gulf states will doubtless be digesting hard lessons about their particular vulnerabilities and need to look to their own defences and alliances. Huge wealth is all very well, but if it can be compromised and switched off at source, with a few well-aimed missiles, there are some obvious missing links which require identification and drastic remedies. And what might be the feelings of the 20,000 seafarers still apparently aboard the trapped ships, watching their colleagues become targets from missiles and drones?

There were some very wise words last weekend from the Columbia Group's CEO Mark O'Neil, who urged people to think about the cumulative consequences of the recent years and present hostilities, to recruitment and retention. Because it is not just what the current seafaring workforce is thinking, and especially those in present hazard in Gulf waters. Of course there are worried people stuck aboard ships, looking at the smoke and fire from the latest missile strikes and hoping that the next one does not have their co-ordinates entered. But there are plenty of others, who cannot get off their ships because of the chaos caused to airline schedules, and no reliefs in sight for the same reason.

Is this, they wonder, just another reprise of the Covid period, and perhaps the last straw, as they contemplate their increasingly unhappy and uncertain life at sea? And even more influential in our connected age will be the anguished messages on their devices from their loved ones ashore, expressing real worries about the risks they are running aboard their ships in dangerous places. Why would you put them through all this worry and grief? Is it not time you forgot about seafaring and took up something rather less stressful? It is a conversation, one might suggest, that is becoming a regular feature in these grim times.

Michael Grey is former editor of *Lloyd's List*.

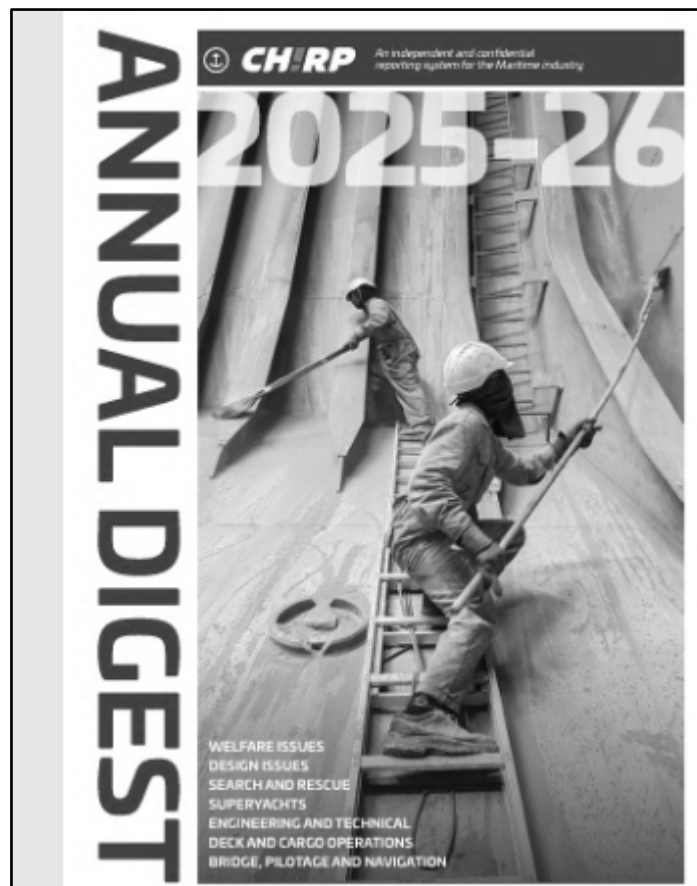
This article was first published in *The Maritime Advocate Online* No 905 of 10 April 2026 and appears here by kind permission of the author and of the editor.

CHIRP Annual Digest of Reports and Insights 2025-26

The past year has once again demonstrated that when maritime voices speak up, meaningful safety improvements can follow.

In 2025 London-based charity CHIRP* received 330 reports concerning safety, welfare or compliance from

all sectors: commercial shipping, superyachts, fishing, maritime pilots, offshore installations, ports, SAR units, recreational vessels and even the 'shadow fleet'. CHIRP responded to every case.



Many of the issues raised were serious, and some were urgent. Through close engagement with companies, Flag States, Port States Control, classification societies and MoU bodies, corrective action was taken in virtually every instance.

Unsafe equipment and procedures were corrected; abandoned seafarers repatriated; unpaid seafarers received their wages; harbour staffing levels were restored to safe standards; MARPOL breaches investigated, and several allegations of criminal behaviour were escalated appropriately.

The CHIRP Annual Digest of Reports and Insight articles 2015-26 is available using the link here: <https://tinyurl.com/3z7tvf6n>

*CHIRP = Confidential Human Factors and Incident Reporting Programme.

Gulf traffic, Singapore, UNCLOS, USN blockade

On 8 April the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Singapore, issued the following statement:

'Singapore welcomes the announcement of a two-week ceasefire in the Middle East.'

'We are encouraged that the parties involved have taken this important step towards de-escalation and

commend the efforts of the mediators, in particular Pakistan.

'We urge all parties to adhere to the ceasefire, halt all attacks on non-belligerent States, and engage in negotiations in good faith that will bring about a lasting resolution to this conflict.'

'Singapore further welcomes the commitment under the ceasefire to restoring shipping traffic through the Strait of Hormuz.'

'We call on all parties to uphold their obligations under international law, restore safe and unimpeded transit passage in the Strait of Hormuz in accordance with the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, and ensure the safety of seafarers and ships'

UNCLOS

The day before, 7 April, Singapore's Minister for Foreign Affairs Dr Vivian Balakrishnan, in answering a parliamentary question outlined the right of passage under UNCLOS. He made clear Singapore's position regarding what are known as Straits Used for International Navigation. Examples here are the Strait of Hormuz with the Straits of Malacca and Singapore. There is a right of transit passage through such waters enshrined in the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) of which Singapore is a signatory.

For more on UNCLOS see here, particularly Articles 17 to 21: <https://tinyurl.com/4tvz8s6w>

USN blockade

During 12 April widespread news report from around the world indicated that the US Navy was to begin blockading ships trying to enter or leave the Strait of Hormuz.

This would be *'effective immediately'*, US President Donald Trump said in a social media post that day. He added that the US would *'interdict'* every vessel in international waters that had paid a toll to Iran for passing through the critical waterway.

A revolutionary balanced lashing system

MacGregor launch

MacGregor has launched its new Balanced Lashing System, a reliable solution designed to solve the long-standing industry challenge of uneven load distribution in container ship lashings. This was announced in mid-March.

On conventional container ships, lashings often share loads unevenly, with upper lashings bearing the majority of the stress while lower lashings operate at only about half of their safe capacity.

Changing the dynamic

It is understood that MacGregor's Balanced Lashing System changes this dynamic by using proven elastic

elements, materials used successfully for decades in hatch cover bearing pads, to distribute forces evenly across the entire lashing system.

Key benefits of the Balanced Lashing System for shipowners are claimed to be:

- **Increased payload:** by evening out component stress, shipowners can achieve significantly better stack weights, enabling the loading of up to 10% more cargo on deck.
- **Enhanced safety:** The system reduces the risk of broken container corners and lashing bar failures by eliminating peak loads on the upper turnbuckles.
- **Operational resilience:** The integrated elastic elements act as shock absorbers, smoothing vertical impact forces caused by a ship's rolling in extreme sea states.
- **Simplicity and efficiency:** For existing vessels, the upgrade requires no hot works; operators simply need to replace the upper turnbuckle.

To quote Magnus Sjöberg, Executive Vice President, MacGregor: *'Our Balanced Lashing System answers the critical question of whether to prioritise safety or capacity by delivering both. It allows for a more intuitive lashing process while simultaneously boosting the vessel's earning potential.'*

Two years of testing

This system has already undergone two years of successful onboard testing with major partners. Far from a concept, it is already in active commercial service and has been ordered for over one hundred forthcoming ships, it is reported.



The balanced lashing system is now available for all container ships larger than 5,000 TEU equipped with external lashing systems.

Class approval

It has already received class approvals from Det Norske Veritas (DNV) and American Bureau of Shipping (ABS), with Lloyd's Register (LR) approval currently in process.

For more information readers are invited to use the link here: <https://tinyurl.com/4m3j7z7s>

International Arctic Meeting

Canadian Coast Guard and Norwegian Coast Guard liaison

A delegation from the Canadian Coast Guard met counterparts at the Arctic Coast Guard Forum Principals' Meeting held in Copenhagen on 16 April. This was an important opportunity to strengthen international partnerships and reinforce Canada's leadership role among Arctic coast guards.

To enhance dialogue

It was a valuable occasion to enhance dialogue on emerging challenges in the Arctic region, identify opportunities for collaboration and share information on maritime security, and contribute to shaping the future direction of the Arctic Coast Guard Forum.

To strengthen collaboration

This meeting offered an opportunity to strengthen collaboration with Arctic Coast Guard Forum partners to advance maritime and Arctic security following the increased security responsibilities and authorities given to the Canadian Coast Guard in the Strengthening Canada's Immigration System and Borders Act (Bill C-12).

As the head of the Canadian delegation, Kevin Brosseau, Commissioner of the Canadian Coast Guard, finalized and signed the amended agreement between the Canadian Coast Guard and the Norwegian Coast Guard, expanding collaboration between the Canadian Coast Guard Academy and the Norwegian Coast Guard School. This agreement reflects a shared commitment to professional development, training excellence, and long-term operational cooperation for both organizations including curriculum development, course and training exchange, and instructor and personnel exchange.

Underscoring commitment

Canada's participation in the Arctic Coast Guard Forum underscores its commitment to Arctic safety, security, and stewardship through strong international cooperation.

Comment

In the words of The Honourable David J McGuinty, Minister of National Defence, Canada: *'Engagements like the Arctic Coast Guard Forum are vital to strengthening our alliances and partnerships. As Canada has met NATO's two percent of GDP defence spending target, we are making the investments needed to bolster maritime security, deepen cooperation with trusted allies, and enable the Canadian Coast Guard to play an expanded role in safeguarding the Arctic—now and for generations to come.'*

Kevin Brosseau, Senior Associate Deputy Minister of National Defence, Commissioner of the Canadian Coast Guard, and Canada's Fentanyl Czar added: *'I*

would like to thank Major General Søren Andersen of Denmark's Joint Arctic Command for hosting this important event. The Arctic Coast Guard Forum Principals' meeting facilitated meaningful collaboration with Arctic partners on shared priorities, including the exploration of new areas of cooperation with respect to maritime security, following the recent adoption of the Strengthening Canada's Immigration System and Borders Act (Bill C-12). On the margins of the meeting, I was pleased to sign a cooperation agreement with the Norwegian Coast Guard, further strengthening our collective ability to work together in service of Arctic security.'

Background

The Arctic Coast Guard Forum Principals' Meeting theme is "ice" which tries to address the risks posed by isolated and ice-filled areas in the Arctic.



Photo per www.canada.ca

Canadian Coast Guard Crown Copyright 2026 ©

The Arctic Coast Guard Forum is an independent, informal, operationally-driven organization, not bound by treaty, to foster safe, secure, and environmentally responsible maritime activity in the Arctic.

The Arctic Coast Guard Forum is a voluntary forum comprised of the eight-member states of the Arctic Council: Canada, United States, Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Finland, and Russia (not currently active).

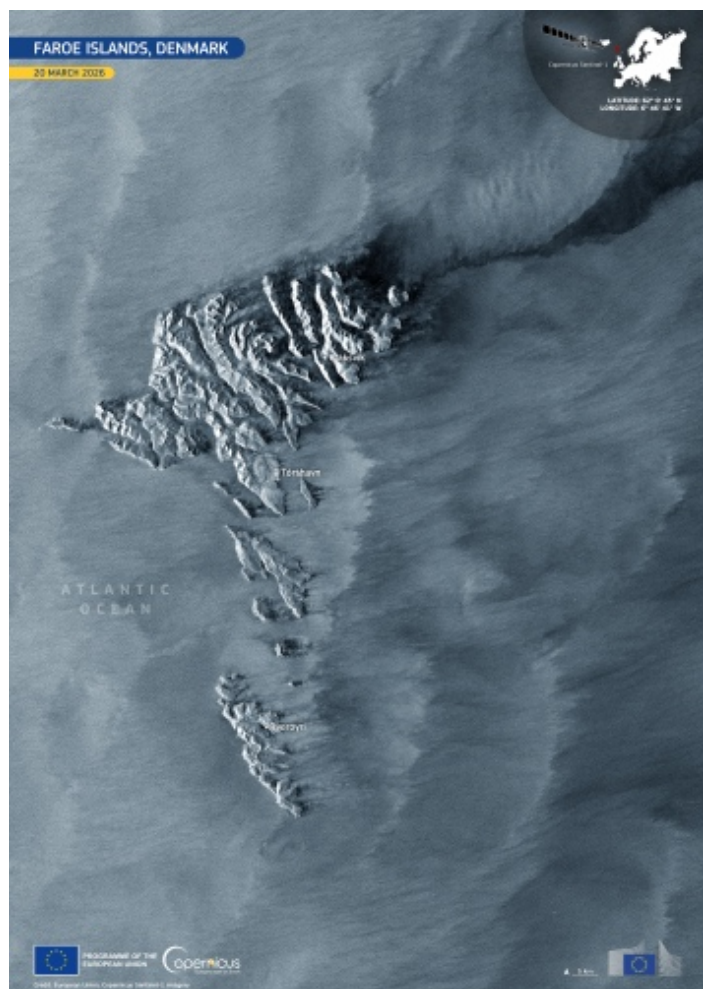
The Canadian Coast Guard and the Norwegian Coast Guard amended their agreement by increasing cooperation in education and training. The Canadian Coast Guard Academy and the Norwegian Coast Guard School will further collaborate on curriculum development, digital learning systems, instructor and personnel exchanges, and joint professional development initiatives through 2036.

Copernicus provides

Atlantic winds shape sea-surface patterns around the Faroe Islands

Located in the North Atlantic Ocean between Iceland and Norway, the Faroe Islands are an autonomous territory of the Kingdom of Denmark, characterised by steep volcanic terrain and a highly dynamic marine

climate. Their rugged topography strongly influences local weather patterns, producing pronounced ocean-atmosphere interactions at subpolar latitudes.



Credit: European Union, Copernicus Sentinel-1 imagery

EU Copernicus ©

This image, acquired by one of the Copernicus Sentinel-1 satellites on 20 March 2026, shows the sea-surface roughness patterns generated by strong winds across the Atlantic Ocean. Ridges and fjords are clearly distinguishable across the Faroe Islands' interior, where the contrast between the terrain and the surrounding sea surface is particularly pronounced.

Copernicus Sentinel-1 radar data provide all-weather, day-and-night observations of sea-surface roughness, supporting weather monitoring and a better understanding of coastal and marine processes in northern marine environments.

The Scandinavian Peninsula in April 2026

The Scandinavian Peninsula, which comprises Norway, Sweden, and Finland, is characterised by a diverse landscape of rugged mountains, extensive boreal forests, and deeply indented coastlines shaped by ancient glaciers. In early spring, the region undergoes a notable seasonal transition: while winter snow persists in the north and at higher elevations, southern areas begin to thaw, influencing the region's hydrology and ecosystems.

This cloud-free satellite image, acquired on 11 April 2026 by one of the Copernicus Sentinel-3 satellites, shows widespread snow cover across Norway's mountainous spine, northern Sweden, and Finland. The Norwegian fjords appear as dark, narrow inlets cutting through bright snow-covered terrain, while the Gulf of Bothnia and the broader Baltic Sea display deep blue waters, with residual ice visible along the northern shores. Southern Sweden and Finland show more exposed land, with muted brown and green tones indicating early snowmelt.



Credit: European Union, Copernicus Sentinel-3 imagery

EU Copernicus©

Copernicus satellite data support systematic monitoring of snow extent and snowmelt dynamics, which is essential for water resource management, flood forecasting, and understanding seasonal climate variability across northern Europe.

ISWAN Practical guidance for seafarers

A guide for those affected by conflict in the Middle East

During long periods of uncertainty, focusing on what you can do day-to-day can make conditions on board safer, calmer and more manageable for everyone.

Guidance published by the International Seafarers' Welfare and Assistance Network (ISWAN) shares tips on how the seafarer can manage essential resources

and support each other while vessels remain stranded in the Middle East.

ISWAN
PRACTICAL GUIDANCE FOR SEAFARERS:
A guide for those affected by conflict in the Middle East

During long periods of uncertainty, focusing on what you can do day-to-day can make conditions on board safer, calmer and more manageable for everyone. Here's some guidance on how you can manage essential resources and support each other while vessels remain stranded in the Middle East:

Understanding the situation

- Ships and crew have been stranded in the Persian Gulf, Gulf of Oman or Strait of Hormuz since February 2020
- Supplies such as fuel, fresh water and food may be running low
- There is uncertainty about when normal operations will resume

Focus on what you can control

Use fuel and lubricants wisely

- Monitor fuel use carefully – avoid unnecessary consumption
- Minimise steam wastage to save fuel and fresh water
- Use machinery lubricants and diesel sparingly if resupply is unlikely

Protect your fresh water supply

- Reduce non-essential water use
- Consider showering less often if supplies become low
- Wash only necessary clothing items
- Work together as a crew to use water fairly

Make food supplies last

- Plan simple meals that stretch supplies
- Support the galley team by reducing menu variety
- Prepare only what's needed to avoid waste
- Use cold storage well to keep food safe for longer

Use personal essentials mindfully

- Take stock of essential personal items like toiletries and medicines
- Use supplies sparingly to help them last longer
- Let a senior officer know early if you are running low on anything essential

Looking after yourself and each other

- Check in with each other regularly
- Small acts of kindness or humour can lift morale
- Contact your company's shore team when guidance is needed
- Make sure your family has contact details for company representatives

You don't have to manage this alone. ISWAN's helpline is available 24/7 to provide emotional support whenever you or a fellow crew member might need it.
Visit www.iswan.org.uk/get-support to talk to someone confidentially.

The English version of the guide in Infographic form is available here: <https://tinyurl.com/2cpzszzb>

A pdf version is also available.

A confidential talk to ISWAN can be enabled here: www.iswan.org.uk/get-support

Mission to Seafarers

Active in the Gulf with assistance to seafarers

According to a report from the London-based charity Mission to Seafarers received on 20 April an estimated 50,000 seafarers were currently stranded in the Strait of Hormuz, caught in a “traffic jam” of more than 1,000 vessels, facing missile attacks and diminishing supplies.

That day it was reported by the Mission that John Attenborough, its Middle East and South-Asia Regional Director, had indicated that ships were running dangerously low on food and water, and his teams across the region were receiving an increasing number of calls for assistance.

Video news

Transmitted from Cyprus Attenborough's video on the situation is available with the link here: <https://tinyurl.com/2v56efpw>

With desalination plants unable to run while they are stationary, ships are becoming reliant on supply vessels for water, but delivering much-needed supplies under the current conditions is becoming a significant logistical challenge.

Seafarers abandoned

The worst affected are the crews onboard fourteen vessels that were already abandoned by their owners before the war began. Without salaries or supplies, they are reliant on MtS for support.

As the conflict continued, seafarers were facing heightened safety and psychological risks. Crews reported increased anxiety about personal security, contract stability, and the ability to communicate with families, compounded by the fatigue from 24-hour watch. Disembarkation is now a logistical impossibility for many.

Coordinating with many parties

Despite these challenges, MtS pastoral teams continued to provide direct support and welfare guidance, coordinating with agents, ship management companies and Gulf States to facilitate deliveries, provide support with repatriation where possible and to protect seafarers' rights,

Over the Easter weekend, MtS coordinated two deliveries of food and water out to vessels in the anchorages, supporting crews who had quite literally been left without anything.



The charity's focus remains on safeguarding well-being, ensuring fair treatment, and maintaining essential supply chains under increasingly volatile conditions.

By Michael Grey, Honorary IFSMA Member

“Hormuz commanded the traffic along the shores of the Indian Ocean, linking what are now Oman and Pakistan, as well as the traffic through the Strait of Hormuz up to Basra in Iraq....” It was “a dust blown port with no natural resources, but with as many as 40,000 inhabitants.” Seeking some light relief from current world events, I have been reading David Abulafia’s huge and fascinating “The Boundless Sea – a human history of the oceans”, which is exactly what it says in the title and traces the interaction of mankind with the watery wastes since the dawn of human times.

It is an astonishing piece of work and if you are trying to put maritime history into a global context, rather than the somewhat Eurocentric dimension many of us have been brought up with, it is compulsive reading, as the author ranges between the various oceans which wash our respective shores, over millennia. It was nearly 700 pages into this story that the word “Hormuz” suddenly exploded onto the pages, with Abulafia’s account of the Portuguese 16th century maritime empire and their efforts to bludgeon their way into a route for eastern spices to reach European markets that did not require the hazardous voyage around South Africa. And it is a gripping tale, with the difficulties of forcing the heavily contested passage through the Red Sea, or alternatively, securing the Arabian Gulf, replicating the power politics of today in a somewhat eerie fashion.

There is even a Trump-like character, in the terrifying Portuguese Admiral Alfonso de Albuquerque, whose policy of extreme violence, “that spared neither women nor children” bullied Hormuz into submission when his fleet arrived on the scene in 1507. They were to keep their tight control over what they recognised was a strategic location for their trade for more than a century. The ruins of their forts and defences are still visible today. In a curious fashion, this forensic examination of power politics in those days puts an interesting perspective on current events in that turbulent but strategically vital location. It was important to those who contested those waters then, for much the same reasons as they are considered vital to world trade today, as silks, spices and the riches of the east have given way to energy and agricultural cargoes.

One somehow suspects that these historical perspectives might be considered irrelevant to the various contestants as they trade their demands for a peace settlement that might get traffic flowing and the strait once again a properly recognised international waterway. Both the US and Iran have shown willingness to enforce their respective “blockades” by force and there is no great optimism that the plight of the marooned ships and their crews will be ended soon. The boast that Iran’s navy had been “obliterated” (a word that was probably in the vocabulary of Admiral Albuquerque) seems to have lacked complete

credibility, with its “mosquito fleet” of small craft still demonstrating their capabilities.

A neighbour, who is a former army officer, asked me over the garden fence “if a modern navy, with its vast resources and complete air superiority, can’t defend itself against speedboats and jetskis, is there any point in them?” There is no obvious answer, except perhaps to wonder whether the military mindset has completely adjusted to the sort of wars that are being fought today with their drones and swarms and missiles? Might this be a case once again of today’s generals fighting yesterday’s war? Beyond my pay grade. Another relevant question might be whether the protection of merchant shipping is still a role for navies, when the ownership of those merchant ships is so opaque? Which ship is any multi-national force of warships supposed to protect, or is the protection “flag-blind”? This was not the case in the Iran -Iraq confrontation in the 1980s, when there was all sort of desperate reflagging undertaken to join a convoy under a naval umbrella. Why should the US, or any other taxpayer, pay to supply protection for ships under convenient flags, with no connection to the protecting naval units? It is possible that this sort of question will arise again, as history, repeats itself.

Michael Grey is former editor of Lloyd’s List.

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Navigational risks in a rapidly changing Arctic

Joint Advisory Warnings by ARHC and PAME

News was issued by the IHO on 22 April to the effect that the Arctic Regional Hydrographic Commission (ARHC) and the Arctic Council Working Group on the Protection of the Arctic Marine Environment (PAME) had officially released a joint advisory titled *Caution Required When Navigating in Arctic Waters..*

To assist in improving regional safety, mariners are explicitly encouraged to promptly report any uncharted dangers or chart discrepancies to national hydrographic offices.

This 2026 advisory serves as a critical update to the original cautionary note issued by the ARHC in 2017. The updated note reflects significant shifts in the region, specifically addressing the challenges posed by a rapidly changing Arctic, the emergence of new maritime routes, and a steady increase in vessel traffic.

Navigating technical and environmental challenges

While the International Maritime Organization (IMO) has authorized the use of S-100 capable Electronic Chart Display and Information Systems (ECDIS)

starting in 2026, and vessels may increasingly rely on products and services built on IHO S-100 Standards, the note stresses that technology alone cannot eliminate risk.

Key highlights of the advisory include:

- **Data Limitations:** Despite advancements in surveying, substantial areas of the Arctic still lack modern hydrographic data.
- **Reliability Gaps:** Predictability of ice coverage and digital communication challenges continue to limit the reliability of even state-of-the-art Electronic Navigation Charts (ENCs).
- **Safety Standards:** The note emphasizes adherence to the Polar Code and the STCW Convention to ensure crews are properly trained for hazard-prone polar environments.
- **Voyage Planning:** Mariners are urged to conduct extensive planning, including reviewing emergency procedures and assessing survival equipment before entering Arctic waters.

The advisory notes: *'The Arctic remains a complex and potentially dangerous area.'*

To assist in improving regional safety, mariners are explicitly encouraged to promptly report any uncharted dangers or chart discrepancies to national hydrographic offices.

A full statement by the Arctic Region Hydrographic Commission (ARHC) can be found using the link here: <https://iho.int/en/arctic-region-hc>

About ARHC

The Arctic Regional Hydrographic Commission (ARHC) is an international body established to improve the safety and efficiency of maritime navigation in the Arctic. As the regional hydrographic commission for the Arctic recognized by the International Hydrographic Organization (IHO), the ARHC functions as a specialized group of hydrographic experts from IHO Member States to improve Arctic regional co-ordination, enhance exchange of information, and foster training and technical assistance.

About PAME

The Protection of the Arctic Marine Environment (PAME) is one of six working groups of the Arctic Council, the leading intergovernmental forum promoting cooperation, coordination, and interaction among the Arctic States, Arctic Indigenous Peoples, and other Arctic inhabitants on common Arctic issues. PAME serves as the primary Arctic Council working group responsible for policy-related initiatives focused on the conservation and sustainable use of the Arctic marine environment.

About IHO

The International Hydrographic Organization (IHO) is an intergovernmental organization whose primary aim is to ensure that all the world's seas, oceans and

navigable waters are surveyed and charted. The IHO S-100 Universal Hydrographic Data Model provides the framework underpinning next-generation electronic navigational products and services, including those referenced in this advisory.

Immersion suit rises to challenge for faster protection

With regard to immersion suits donning speed for emergency situations is a primary attraction of a new suit from VIKING Life-Saving Equipment that is made to measure up to US-specific requirements.

Six hours of thermal protection in cold water

Commercial shipping's leading safety solutions provider has launched the VIKING YouSafe™ Crest (PS2016) immersion suit as a standardized solution to offer six hours of thermal protection in cold water conditions for fleets that come under US Coast Guard jurisdiction.



VIKING YouSafe Crest: Esbjerg Harbour.

Made out of durable and naturally buoyant neoprene, the new suit comes in three updated sizes to ensure watertight protection for the full range of body types involved in modern seafaring. Notable safety features include reinforced soles, inflatable buoyancy for better freedom of movement, high-vis reflective trim, and a yellow hood to attract attention in daylight or dark waters.

For users onboard ships flagged to the US or calling in US-administered ports, the most impactful gains will result from features VIKING has designed-in to the VIKING YouSafe™ Crest suit to accelerate donning speeds.

In the words of Camilla Schultz Georgsen, Product Manager PPE Marine, VIKING Life-Saving Equipment: *'Donning when every second counts has been a key driver in developing the YouSafe™ Crest immersion suit.'*

'The US Coast Guard has approved use of the Aquaseal plastic zipper, which offers fast and dependable closure, and needs less maintenance than a conventional metal zipper. The Crest also

comes with detachable gloves, with hands free to put it on quickly, close the zipper, and make adjustments without losing critical time by struggling with bulky gloves.'



VIKING YouSafe Crest: onboard.

Being able to take off gloves also made tasks such as attaching lines or handling whistles easier, she said.

The VIKING YouSafe™ Crest immersion suit also offers other safety gains, with an integrated inflatable head support assisting flotation and holding the user in position to maintain clear airways. The buoyancy effects of the suit's neoprene material and the inflated head support mean that the user has no need for any additional flotation device, including a lifejacket.

Use is backed by VIKING's authorized service network, which offers maintenance, documentation and compliance without unnecessary complexity, plus periodic formal services and pressure testing of material quality and ageing, adhesive joints and seams to ensure watertight integrity.

Swedish Club warning: Carriage of Baled Refuse-Derived Fuel (RDF)

On 10 April the Swedish Club reported in a notice to its members that recent cases have highlighted a number of safety and operational concerns connected with the carriage of baled Refuse Derived Fuel (RDF).

It is understood that this cargo is increasingly traded, but its behaviour at sea remains variable and, at times, hazardous.

These issues are often linked to limited cargo information and to the absence of an IMSBC Code* or IMDG Code** classification.

The Swedish Club's circular provided an outline of the main hazards and the potential implications for Members.

Background

RDF is produced from mixed municipal and commercial waste after sorting and removal of non-combustible materials. The remaining fraction

can contain a significant biodegradable component and often varies considerably in composition. Moisture levels, storage duration and the condition of the bale wrapping influence how the cargo behaves during transport. Since RDF is not covered by an IMSBC schedule, the Master cannot rely on established reference criteria. Safe carriage depends to a large extent on the accuracy and completeness of information provided by the shipper.

Misdeclaration

Misdeclaration continues to be a recurring issue. Declarations may describe the material in broad terms or compare it to conventional biomass without addressing characteristics relevant to maritime carriage. Details regarding moisture content, storage history, contamination or bale integrity are often absent. When the cargo behaves inconsistently with the declaration, Members may face operational delays and disagreements with charterers or receivers concerning responsibility for additional measures or costs.

Cargo Hazards

RDF may generate toxic gases such as hydrogen sulphide and carbon monoxide, as well as methane and other flammable gases.

Oxygen depletion inside the hold is possible. Heat development may occur as the biodegradable fraction decomposes. These conditions can arise gradually or without warning and may make the hold unsafe to enter. Adjacent spaces can also be affected if not fully sealed or adequately ventilated.

Operational and Commercial Impact

The hazards described above may result in restrictions at the port of discharge. Authorities may delay entry or require verification of safe atmospheric conditions before berthing. Stevedores may decline to commence discharge until acceptable readings are obtained.

At certain ports, the presence of specialist personnel or firefighting units is required before hatches are opened. Such measures can lead to time at anchorage, increased port costs and possible shifting between berths.

Members may face off-hire exposure, claims for delayed delivery or disputes concerning liability for specialist attendance, atmospheric testing or disposal of contaminated residues. Where declarations prove incomplete, establishing the cause of delay can become contentious.

Recommendations

Members are advised to obtain detailed cargo information before accepting RDF for shipment. Any uncertainty concerning composition, moisture content, storage duration or bale condition should be addressed directly with the shipper. A documented inspection of the cargo at the terminal is recommended.

Regular monitoring of the hold atmosphere should be conducted during the voyage, and all readings should be recorded. Abnormal values should be reported to the Shippers/Charterers and the Club without delay. On arrival, Members should be prepared for additional requirements imposed by local authorities or stevedores.

Given the absence of clear IMO guidance on the safe carriage of this cargo and the frequency of misdeclaration, a cautious approach is recommended. Members should ensure that charterparty terms clearly allocate responsibilities related to delay, hazardous atmospheres and associated costs.

* <https://imorules.com/IMSBC.html>

** <https://tinyurl.com/yc5a5dfk>

INTERCARGO advice

Middle East Gulf:

Continued regional disruption impacts to crew welfare and inspections

In reference to INTERCARGO's posting *Vigilance and Protection of Bulk Carrier Seafarers and shore-based Personnel in the Gulf Region**, INTERCARGO remains concerned regarding the continuing conflict in the Gulf region.

Rapidly evolving environment

The conflict has created an exceptional and rapidly evolving operating environment for dry bulk vessel owners, operators, and managers. Many ships are unable to follow normal trading routes and are experiencing significant delays. In these circumstances, the safety, security, and wellbeing of seafarers remain the highest priority, and INTERCARGO is actively engaging with stakeholders to ensure crews have access to necessary welfare support.

Welfare

Crew welfare, especially crew changes and repatriation, has been severely disrupted by unpredictable vessel movements, limited port access, and regional airport closures. Despite operators' best efforts, maintaining safe manning levels is becoming increasingly difficult.

Ships inspections in jeopardy

These operational constraints are also limiting the ability of vessels to undergo industry inspections such as vetting, Class, terminal, and others. With inspection opportunities reduced or unavailable, some ships may be unable to complete inspections within standard validity periods. Should the disruption continue, similar challenges may arise with statutory Class Surveys; and no doubt Classification Societies and Flag Registries will be considering pragmatic measures to address potential scheduling difficulties.

Understanding and flexibility requested

As these circumstances are entirely beyond the control of owners, operators, and managers, INTERCARGO has indicated that it respectfully requests understanding and flexibility from all parties. Vessels should not be disadvantaged or penalised solely due to the temporary inability to complete inspections normally conducted within fixed intervals under such extraordinary circumstances.

Commitment to high standards

The dry bulk sector remains committed to the highest standards of safety, operational integrity, and transparency. All required inspections will be completed at the earliest practical opportunity once normal trading conditions and access to inspection facilities are restored.

INTERCARGO trusts that stakeholders recognise the seriousness of the situation and the importance of supporting both safe operations and the welfare of the seafarers working under these difficult conditions.

The dry bulk sector remains fully committed to upholding the highest standards of safety, operational performance, and transparency.

INTERCARGO thanks all involved stakeholders for their continued cooperation and support.

INTERCARGO intends to further share this message on social media and encourages its members to share this message from INTERCARGO with their networks.

* <https://tinyurl.com/3yhpd67e>

Knowledge gaps

ECDIS proficiency and ECDIS Training Assessments (ETA)

Knowledge gaps

NorthStandard has published the first data-driven benchmark of ECDIS proficiency, revealing widespread knowledge gaps among bridge teams despite years of industry focus on training.

The *Learning from the Data* report draws on more than 5,000 assessments from the insurer's ETA platform, developed with the UK Hydrographic Office. It provides an unprecedented snapshot of how crews actually use electronic chart display and information systems in practice.

These findings show that two-thirds of bridge teams could not identify ENC updates, while nearly half failed to prioritise the correct ENC scale during passage planning.

Crews also struggled with alarms versus alerts, datum issues and key safety settings.

In the words of Tom Mellor of the UKHO: '*ECDIS is a powerful tool... however, improper use can lead to*

alarms and indications not functioning as expected – and ultimately navigational errors.'

With the transition to S-100 standards approaching, improving real-world ECDIS

proficiency is likely to become a critical priority for safe and compliant operations.

ECDIS

Two years after launching its ECDIS Training Assessment (ETA) platform, NorthStandard draws on cumulative assessment data in a new report which includes key insights on the way shipping can improve ECDIS proficiency on the bridge.

A unique data set drawn from more than 5,000 ETA assessments underpins a new NorthStandard report which highlights common gaps in ECDIS knowledge and helps bridge teams take charge of their own upskilling.

The *ETA – Learning from the Data* report draws on one year of Member engagement with NorthStandard's ECDIS Training Assessment (ETA) – a first-of-its-kind tool developed with the UK Hydrographic Office (UKHO) to strengthen bridge team proficiency. Using anonymised ETA results from almost 120 Members, the report offers a clear picture of industry competence and how it changes over time.

Tom Mellor, Head of Technical Partnering, UKHO and Chairman of the International Hydrographic Organizations ENC standards maintenance working group commented: *'ECDIS is a powerful tool whose use demonstrably improves navigational safety, as well as situational awareness, when used properly.'*

'However, improper use can lead to alarms and indications not functioning as expected – and ultimately navigational errors. These findings help identify where knowledge gaps exist today, so they can be addressed through targeted training; supporting confident use of current systems and helping crews build on familiar ECDIS principles as S-100 data is introduced.'

Assessments found two-thirds of bridge teams could not identify ENC updates, and nearly half did not prioritise correct ENC scale in planning. Many also struggled to distinguish alarms from alerts, spot datum issues and verify positions, with further gaps around safety settings (including contours), key symbols and

ECDIS functions.

John Southam, Loss Prevention Director – Greece, NorthStandard, added: *'The industry has long been aware of gaps in seafarers' ECDIS proficiency but this report distils the issues that need attention.'*

'Analysing consolidated data brings a better understanding of where gaps are superficial or entrenched, and insights that help NorthStandard

make informed recommendations to Members on priorities for future navigational safety campaigns.'

Available free of charge to Members, NorthStandard's ETA is an easy-to-use online ECDIS resource which offers instant feedback to support self-evaluation, while also guiding the user towards additional training materials. Anonymised engagement provides discretion to promote a continuous learning culture. Company-level data is not available to NorthStandard unless shared by the Member.

In conclusion Southam commented: *'NorthStandard's ETA gives shipping companies an insight into crews competence at a granular level never seen before.'*

'It supports learning to mitigate risk long before an accident can occur and gives individual crew members the opportunity to take charge of their own development as well.'

Owners using the NorthStandard ETA can redistribute the assessment to deck officers as often as needed. Repeated use over time helps seafarers to enhance skills, keep up to date and ensure ECDIS best practice is given priority.

Data shows that crew retaking the assessment increase their results by up to 10% on the second attempt. This improvement can only be enhanced as recent updates include an AI-powered library of ECDIS information to support self-learning. The update also includes easier-to-read reports and clearer sign-up emails for crew and members, and a survey allowing crew to evaluate practical issues they face with different ECDIS models to assist with onboard familiarisation focus.

NorthStandard continues to work in collaboration with the UKHO and Seall ECDIS to enhance safe navigation. As well as leveraging simulator-based training, the partners are set to analyse new feedback from classroom training focusing on S-100 ENCs, to enrich understanding of issues relating to mandatory requirements for all newly installed ECDIS to be compatible with the S-100 framework from 1 January 2029.

ECDIS Training Assessment (ETA) – Learning from the Data can be downloaded here: <https://tinyurl.com/y2b4smsw>

About NorthStandard:

NorthStandard is one of the leading providers of global marine insurance products and services across the maritime industries. Established through the merger of North P&I Club and the Standard Club in February it is a leading member of the International Group of P&I Clubs (IG) and is fully committed to upholding the shared objectives of its 12 independent member clubs, which provide liability cover for approximately 85% of the world's ocean-going tonnage.