

FEELING TIRED?



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THE EFFECT OF FATIGUE ON SEAFARERS

IN A NUMBER OF ACCIDENT REPORTS FATIGUE IS MENTIONED AS A MAJOR CONTRIBUTORY FACTOR. THE IMO MARITIME SAFETY COMMITTEE HAS ISSUED A NEW SET OF GUIDELINES (MSC.1/CIRC.1598) TO HELP EVERYONE UNDERSTAND THEIR ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES WHEN MANAGING THE ISSUE OF FATIGUE.

The IMO uses the following definition of fatigue:

'A STATE OF PHYSICAL AND/OR MENTAL IMPAIRMENT RESULTING FROM FACTORS SUCH AS INADEQUATE SLEEP, EXTENDED WAKEFULNESS, WORK/REST REQUIREMENTS OUT OF SYNC WITH CIRCADIAN RHYTHMS AND PHYSICAL, MENTAL OR EMOTIONAL EXERTION THAT CAN IMPAIR ALERTNESS AND THE ABILITY TO SAFELY OPERATE A SHIP OR PERFORM SAFETY-RELATED DUTIES.'

Fatigue has been directly linked to accidents involving personal injury, groundings and other 'near miss' incidents. Investigation reports from the MAIB have noted the following examples:

- Whilst on passage, the officer on watch fell asleep shortly after taking over the watch at midnight. The ship continued on for more than 3 hours and then grounded.
- In another grounding investigation, the chief officer who was on watch fell asleep, having worked solidly for 17 hours in the previous port. The entries in the log recording hours of work and rest had been falsified.

People are often reluctant to admit that they feel so tired that it starts to affect their ability to carry out tasks and especially to carry out their watch keeping duties.

The IMO guidelines are available to read in full here:
<http://ow.ly/F3fY30oGyvc>

As with all recommendations, the guidelines need to be adapted for the individual circumstances on board each ship, looking at trading routes, crew numbers and work requirements.

CASE STUDY

AT ONE OF OUR RECENT LOSS PREVENTION SEMINARS WE WERE DISCUSSING THE ISSUE OF FATIGUE AND A MASTER IN THE AUDIENCE TOLD US ABOUT HOW HE HAD FOLLOWED HIS COMPANY'S SMS PROCEDURE FOR FATIGUE MANAGEMENT AND BELIEVED HE HAD SUFFERED BECAUSE OF THIS.

The ship had been in port for most of the day and all staff on board had been working very hard. Everyone was tired when the ship finally left the berth and so the master anchored for 3 hours in a safe anchorage so that the watchkeepers could rest before proceeding. This was in accordance with the SMS guidelines.

The ship arrived at the next port on time and within the laycan and the manager did not mention the 3 hours at anchor. However, when the master came to the end of his contract he was not offered another position (despite having worked for the company for many years without incident) and he believed this was linked to his decision to allow the rest period.

CONCLUSION

The responsibility for effective fatigue management must be a shared one. Crew must take responsibility to assess their own levels of fatigue and keep accurate sleep records. In turn, the senior officers and management ashore must make sure that there is an effective system in place that takes into account the effects of fatigue on all ship staff and operations.

