December 2025

CREW WATCH

A SHARPER FOCUS ON EYE SAFETY AT SEA

BRITANNIA
P&I CLUB / TRUSTED SINCE 1855

WELCOME

TO THE LATEST EDITION OF CREW WATCH

Welcome to our December issue of Crew Watch, our third edition of the year. We hope you enjoy reading about key issues affecting seafarers at sea.

MEGAN DODD
EDITOR

For our final edition of Crew Watch this year, we focus on the importance of health and safety while at sea. From insights into keeping your eyes protected, safety advice during winter months, to advice on the safe handling of heavy steel plates.

We've also collected and analysed data on the most common causes of illness and injury claims we receive to get a better understanding of why they happen and how to prevent them.

This edition features an exclusive poster from our BSafe campaign, encouraging you to always think about eye safety. You can tear out the poster to display on board.

CONTRIBUTORS TO THIS ISSUE

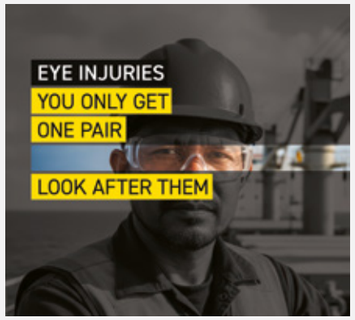
JOBIN MATHEW,
ASSISTANT LOSS PREVENTION MANAGER, BRITANNIA P&I

4 **SAFETY**
PERSONAL SAFETY DURING THE WINTER MONTHS

ANTHONY GARDNER,
LOSS PREVENTION MANAGER, BRITANNIA P&I

6 **SAFETY**
A SHARPER FOCUS ON EYE SAFETY AT SEA

LOSS PREVENTION TEAM,
BRITANNIA P&I



8 **SAFETY**
BSAFE EYE INJURIES POSTER

ANTHONY GARDNER,
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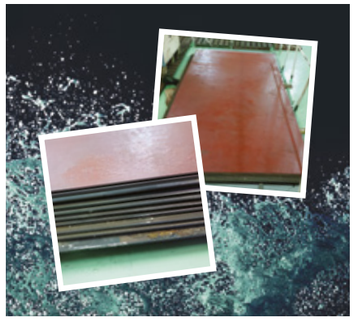


10 **SAFETY**
CRUSH HAZARDS AT SEA: SAFE HANDLING OF HEAVY STEEL PLATES

MEGAN DODD,
COMMUNICATIONS EXECUTIVE, BRITANNIA P&I

12 **HEALTH**
INSIDE THE NUMBERS: BRITANNIA P&I'S MOST COMMON CREW ILLNESS AND INJURY CLAIMS

CREW WATCH | SAFETY

PERSONAL SAFETY DURING THE WINTER MONTHS

JOBIN MATHEW
ASSISTANT LOSS PREVENTION MANAGER, BRITANNIA P&I

As winter begins in the Northern Hemisphere, cold weather can pose significant challenges for shipboard personnel, especially those not accustomed to such conditions. Adequately preparing and raising awareness is essential for maintaining safety and preventing cold-related injuries.

KEY POINTS TO REMEMBER

- **Ensure the vessel is stocked with sufficient warm clothing well in advance of entering cold weather.** Clothing should be ordered in appropriate sizes for all crew members. Special consideration may be required for female crew, who may require different sizing considerations.
- **As a minimum, crew should be supplied with layered cold-weather clothing** such as thermal base layers, balaclavas, parka coats, winter boiler suits, insulated gloves, winter socks, and safety boots suitable for icy conditions.
- **Cold weather can reduce the sensitivity and dexterity of hands.** This may increase the likelihood of error, delay or injury when performing tasks that require fine motor skills. Consider obtaining a stock of gloves that allow precision handling.
- **Wet clothing is a major risk when operating in cold weather, resulting in loss of body heat at a faster rate.** Suitable waterproof protective clothing should be available for when work in wet weather is required.
- **Touching metal in freezing temperatures with bare skin can result in a painful injury,** with the heat and moisture of skin causing a bond to the surface.
- **Crew members should receive training on the effects of cold weather on the human body** and recognition of potential health risks such as hypothermia and frostbite.
- **The ship should carry enough salt or de-icing agents** to treat decks and embarkation areas to prevent ice build-up.
- **Slippery, icy decks are a major risk.** Measures must be taken to minimise slip hazards and ensure safe working surfaces.
- **Special attention must be paid to dietary requirements.** Crew members need access to higher-calorie foods to help the body generate heat and cope with cold exposure.
- **Drinking plenty of water is also crucial, as dehydration can occur easily in cold weather.** Warm drinks can be a way to provide comfort in cold weather whilst also hydrating.
- **Crew should understand the additional risk posed by wind chill,** which can make temperatures feel significantly colder.
- **In extreme weather, outdoor working hours for exposed crew members may need to be reduced to prevent cold-related illnesses.** Consider this at the planning stage of any work activity and be prepared for workers to take regular breaks when long spells outdoor are necessary.

Preparation, proper equipment, and adherence to best practices are essential for preventing injuries and illness during cold weather operations. It is the responsibility of the company and senior management on board to ensure that these measures and resources are in place for the safety of all crew members.

A SHARPER FOCUS ON EYE SAFETY AT SEA

EYE INJURIES REMAIN ONE OF THE MOST COMMON INJURY TYPES THAT ARE HANDLED BY THE CLUB.

ANTHONY GARDNER,
LOSS PREVENTION MANAGER, BRITANNIA P&I

Most injuries occur to personnel engaged in a task such as using power or hand tools, welding, or handling harmful powders or liquids, as well as cargoes. However, there are many examples of personnel who were in the vicinity of other work being carried out and were injured accidentally.

In many cases reviewed, no personal protective equipment (PPE) for the eyes or face was worn, almost always by the injured person's choice. Often the works being carried out were routine or considered simple, quick tasks, where the risk of injury was not perceived or appreciated. In some cases, personnel chose not to wear eye protection, due to personal dislike or the uncomfortable nature of the eye protection available. Analysis also indicates that eye injuries occur across all ranks and experience levels.

> **IN MANY CASES REVIEWED, NO PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT (PPE) FOR THE EYES OR FACE WAS WORN, ALMOST ALWAYS BY THE INJURED PERSON'S CHOICE.**

Another area of concern is the safety guards fitted to tools and machinery to reduce the chances of material being thrown towards an equipment operator. On occasion these are found to be missing or inadequate during condition surveys or following an incident.

RISK ASSESSMENT

All shipboard tasks should be risk assessed, and the possibility of personal injury both for those taking part in the task and others not involved should always be considered.

Where able, the best option is to prevent personnel being put at risk at all. If the specific task can be replaced by an engineered solution, for example installing fixed piping rather than relying on manual handling of liquid drums, this will reduce the chances of eye injuries. However, realistically, many tasks will always require at least one person to be close enough to a work activity where injury to the eyes is possible. For this reason, PPE, often called the last line of defence, is necessary.

The risk assessment for each task should consider the danger posed to eyes and detail the protection that will be required based on the hazard(s) faced. For example, when welding, the protection must prevent damage due to harmful optical radiation. Similarly, whilst safety glasses may be suitable for many tasks, they would not provide the full scope of protection required when working on systems containing pressurised liquids where safety goggles and/or a face shield may be required. Many companies provide a basic matrix showing the eye protection (and other PPE) required for different work activities, and this can simplify decision making substantially.

As noted, personnel in the vicinity of works can also be injured. The risk assessment should consider the provision of physical barriers and/or warning signage to provide physical separation or a reminder to put eye protection in place.

SAFETY GUARDS

Safety guards are there for a reason and must be in place when equipment is in use. We recommend that safety guards on fixed and portable tools are regularly inspected as part of a planned maintenance routine to ensure they remain fit for purpose. Some companies allow only authorised personnel to use fixed workshop tools, with portable power tools kept under control and only issued after receiving authorisation from a senior officer. This can help to prevent misuse and may allow a further check of the equipment before it is used.

COMFORT AND SUITABILITY

Experience shows that uncomfortable PPE will not be worn as often as it should be, also if eye protection is unavailable or difficult to find, many personnel will take a chance and not wear it. It is therefore recommended to seek feedback from the users and personnel conducting the work, to ensure that adequate protection is available for each task and crucially when it is required.

Each person should be responsible for checking their eye protection fits properly. Everyone is different, but most eye protection is standardised and mass produced. If the equipment is unsuitable, seek guidance from a senior officer or your ship's manager.

It is of paramount importance to make quality, approved eye protection available for all crew members. Individual crew members using personal eye protection that may be of lower quality or not fit for purpose must be discouraged.

As we note in our recent safety poster, your eyes are precious. The technology and knowledge exist to keep them safe, and all have a part to play in ensuring that eye safety remains a high priority throughout your time on board. You can tear out the following page to display in any shared area to encourage and remind fellow crew members to consider every aspect of eye safety.

BSAFE

EYE INJURIES
britanniapandi.com/category/bsafe-posters/

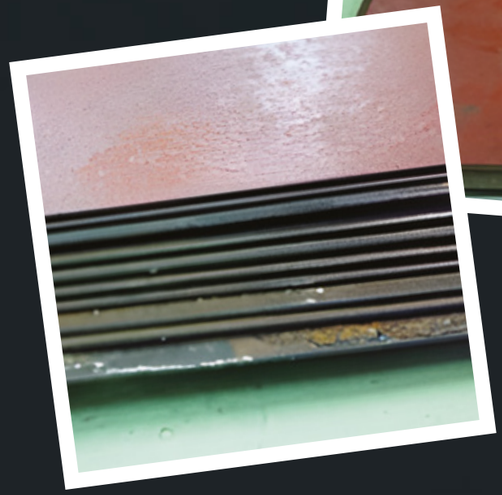
BRITANNIA P&I

CREW WATCH | SAFETY

CRUSH HAZARDS AT SEA:

SAFE HANDLING OF HEAVY STEEL PLATES

ANTHONY GARDNER,
LOSS PREVENTION MANAGER, BRITANNIA P&I



In a case handled by the Club, three crew members were moving 10 pieces of steel plate around the steering gear room while the ship was underway. Each piece measured approximately 2.4m x 1.2m and 5mm thick, weighing around 110kg.

After transferring the plates to their new location, two crew members were holding the plates against adjacent railings, while another crew member was trying to secure the plates to the railings using a rope. The ship rolled unexpectedly due to large swell which resulted in the plates moving and falling on top of the crew member who was attempting to secure them with a rope, partially crushing him as he tried to escape. The injured person (IP) was fortunate that the other crew members were there to help remove the plates which had fallen on to him. However, he did suffer very serious leg, arm, and internal injuries.

The ship was diverted so that the IP could receive emergency medical treatment, and he spent six weeks in hospital before his condition stabilised sufficiently to allow repatriation home to continue medical treatment there.

The investigation after the incident revealed that whilst a risk assessment and toolbox talk had been carried out, they were found to have been done improperly. During the risk assessment process, the risk of personal injury was identified as highly likely and therefore the task should not have been carried out without suitable mitigation measures being in place. For example, any work task that relies solely upon the strength of the personnel involved is not always safe.

It was also found that the toolbox talk was treated as a tick box exercise only; the risks were not discussed, and the job was not adequately supervised as per the work plan.

> "THE INVESTIGATION AFTER THE INCIDENT REVEALED THAT WHILST A RISK ASSESSMENT AND TOOLBOX TALK HAD BEEN CARRIED OUT, THEY WERE FOUND TO HAVE BEEN DONE IMPROPERLY.

TO PREVENT SUCH INCIDENTS IN FUTURE, THE FOLLOWING ACTIONS ARE RECOMMENDED:

- **The risk assessment should be fit for purpose and control methods used to reduce the likelihood of the risk should be clear for everyone involved**
- **During the toolbox talk the risks and actions must be discussed thoroughly with the people involved**
- **The crew should be encouraged to challenge and contribute during risk assessments and toolbox talks**
- **Whenever possible, the correct lifting equipment (such as chain blocks and cranes) should be used**
- **The crew must be encouraged to use the 'stop and think' approach if things do not go according to plan**
- **If the procedures are not effective, they should be reviewed and changed**
- **Lessons learnt should be shared with the fleet**

However, there was a more fundamental problem; the location and arrangement chosen to store these steel plates were inappropriate.

Steel plates are deceptively heavy, and when stowed vertically have a very small surface area to balance upon. Any movement, such as the unpredictable motion of a ship in a seaway, can send them rapidly falling towards deck, only stopping if a sufficiently strong obstacle is encountered.

It is widely acknowledged that for safety reasons, steel plates should be laid flat and stowed horizontally. Where space does not allow this preferred method, they should be stowed in a purpose-made rack of sufficient strength that allows removal of one plate at a time without having to remove the securing arrangement of all.

Unfortunately, too often, steel plates are stowed upright, against a handrail and secured by a piece of rope. This is very dangerous and there are many examples within the shipping industry of personnel being killed or severely injured due to falling steel plates when a person tries to remove them from the stowed position.

We would encourage you to examine your situation on board. Do you have steel plates stowed in an unacceptable manner and could the arrangement be made safer?

INSIDE THE NUMBERS:

BRITANNIA P&I'S MOST COMMON CREW ILLNESS AND INJURY CLAIMS

MEGAN DODD,
COMMUNICATIONS EXECUTIVE, BRITANNIA P&I

AS PART OF OUR CONTINUOUS DEDICATION TO SUPPORTING SEAFARERS IN THE INDUSTRY, WE'VE GATHERED A LIST OF THE TOP 10 ILLNESS AND INJURY CLAIMS WE RECEIVE SO WE CAN EQUIP YOU WITH THE KNOWLEDGE TO STAY HEALTHY AND SAFE.

Alongside Dr. Katherine Sinclaire from MedSea, we've analysed and reported on all the illness and injury claims we've received in the last two policy years from 2022/2023 to 2023/2024.

This article dives into the most common causes of claims we see, and provides information to help you stay healthy to prevent certain illnesses. It also provides safety advice so you can avoid common mishaps at sea and improve your team's safety culture.

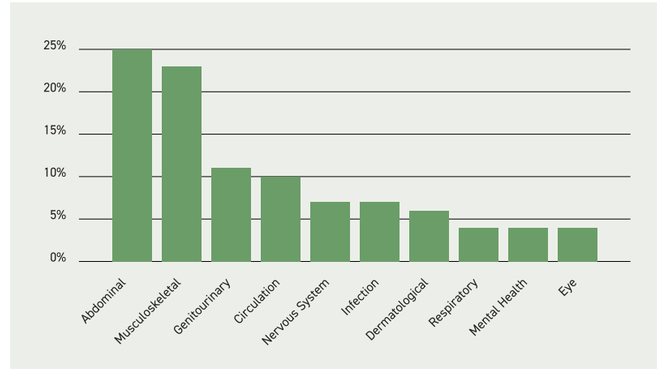
ILLNESSES:

Among our crew claims, illnesses make up the majority of them. These illnesses have a variety of causes, from age to lifestyle and genetics. The risks of many can be reduced by maintaining an active and healthy lifestyle, and by being aware of how to spot and treat certain symptoms. We've provided a further look into a few notable illnesses, highlighted below.

ABDOMINAL

The majority of illness claims we see are due to abdominal pathology, however this category contains a wide variety of diagnoses. Within the overall abdominal category, we see the highest number of claims relating to appendicitis (18%), haemorrhoids (16%), and hernias (14%). These more common varieties are explored in more detail below:

Appendicitis is a common surgical emergency caused by inflammation of the appendix, with the biggest danger being rupture and life-threatening infection. It most often affects people aged 10-30 and requires prompt medical attention, especially at sea where many conditions can mimic its symptoms. Early Telemedical Advice Service (TMAS) consultation is vital, and while surgery is the definitive treatment, starting appropriate antibiotics may help prevent deterioration until the person can be transported to shore medical care.



DESPITE GROWING INDUSTRY AWARENESS, MENTAL HEALTH CASES AMONG SEAFARERS REMAIN UNDER-REPORTED, AND STRESS-RELATED CONDITIONS MAY PRESENT AS PHYSICAL SYMPTOMS SUCH AS ABDOMINAL PAIN OR PALPITATIONS.

Haemorrhoids, sometimes known as piles, are swollen blood vessels that cause pain, itching, and bleeding, often triggered by constipation, straining, diarrhoea, or low-fibre diets. Although usually manageable without surgery, severe or persistent cases can impact a seafarer's ability to work and may result in medical repatriation. Prevention focuses on good hydration, a high-fibre diet, and regular physical activity.

Hernias arise when weakness in the abdominal wall allows tissue to protrude, sometimes becoming trapped and cutting off blood supply, which can be a potentially life-threatening emergency. Risk factors include heavy lifting, chronic coughing, constipation, ageing, and previous family history. Certain hernias, especially those in the groin area, carry higher risks and are best repaired before returning to sea.

MUSCULOSKELETAL INJURIES

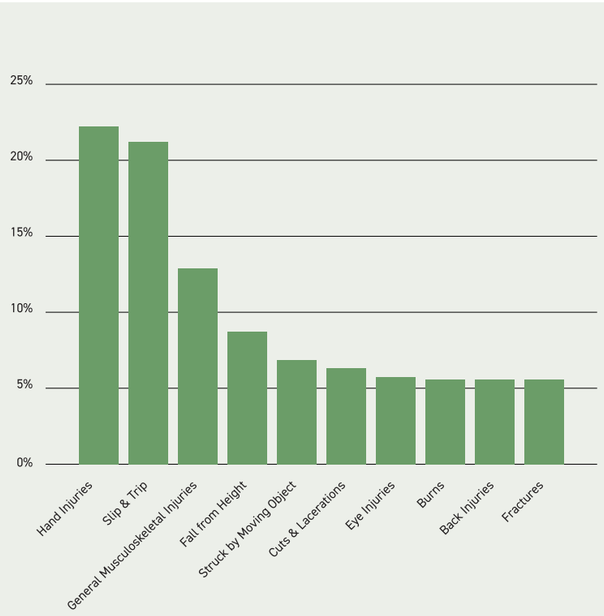
More than half of musculoskeletal cases involve back problems, often linked to heavy lifting, repetitive work, awkward postures, vessel movement, and long hours. These injuries can significantly affect daily function and are a key contributor to time off work, highlighting the importance of safe lifting practices and ergonomic awareness on board.

KIDNEY STONES

Kidney stones account for over half of genitourinary cases and often cause severe renal colic, though symptoms can sometimes resemble appendicitis, risking unnecessary diversions. Dehydration, especially in hot working environments, is a major contributing factor, alongside conditions such as hypertension, diabetes, obesity and previous stone episodes. Stones may pass on their own, but persistent obstruction or infection requires urgent medical treatment.

MENTAL HEALTH

Despite growing industry awareness, mental health cases among seafarers remain under-reported, and stress-related conditions may present as physical symptoms such as abdominal pain or palpitations. Barriers to seeking help include stigma, limited mental-health education, restricted communication while at sea and concerns over confidentiality. Continued efforts to normalise and support mental wellbeing on board remain essential.



INJURIES:

For our injury data, we've reported on the claims we see the highest frequency of, whether that be data collected on what caused the injury, or what body part was injured. We'll be doing a more in-depth analysis of our injury claims data in 2026 so stay tuned for more to come. We've highlighted and discussed a few notable injuries below.

HAND INJURIES

Working at sea is a demanding and challenging profession that requires constant attention to safety. One aspect often overlooked is the prevalence of finger injuries among seafarers. In the confined and dynamic environment of a ship, fingers are susceptible to various hazards, ranging from heavy machinery accidents to repetitive strain injuries.

Hand injuries account for almost 25% of injury claims we receive, with engineers experiencing the highest number of injuries, followed by able seamen.

Medical treatment can range from basic first aid to complex surgeries, with these injuries not only causing pain for the seafarer but also incurring significant costs for shipowners and operators.

SLIP & TRIP

As the second most common cause of injuries, it is imperative to prevent their occurrence and address risks promptly when discovered. Slipping hazards are generally the results of leakage, spillage or poor housekeeping. Effective preventative measures include adequate maintenance, good operational practices and regular cleaning. Ongoing cleaning (not just upon completion of a task) during maintenance and other work can be overlooked but is vitally important to keep the workplace safe. Slips, trips, and falls can cause life changing injuries and are always avoidable. By encouraging active reporting, establishing robust procedures, and maintaining good housekeeping, their likelihood can be minimised.

"HAND INJURIES ACCOUNT FOR ALMOST 25% OF INJURY CLAIMS WE RECEIVE, WITH ENGINEERS EXPERIENCING THE HIGHEST NUMBER OF INJURIES, FOLLOWED BY ABLE SEAMEN.

FALLS FROM HEIGHT

Working at height or over the side of a vessel carries significant risks, including serious falls, dropped objects, ladder failures, and even falling to the sea, often worsened by ship movement and weather. The danger of falling from height also exists at deck level, where tripping risks or unsafe entry into enclosed spaces can lead to collapses or falls. Preventing these incidents relies on thorough risk assessment, proper planning, and, where necessary, the consistent use of well-maintained and securely positioned equipment. Clear communication, adherence to procedures, and an understanding of why crew might deviate from them are essential, as is ongoing training through videos and other resources. Wearing the correct PPE and using barriers where needed further reduces the risk, helping to protect crew during height-related operations.

STRUCK BY MOVING OBJECT

Ships are busy workplaces where personnel often work close to moving machinery, suspended loads, or vehicles. These moving objects can cause severe injuries or fatalities, making it essential to maintain safe distances using marked walkways, physical barriers, or other controls. When keeping a safe distance isn't possible, a formal risk assessment should identify additional control measures, and adequate oversight, such as using high-visibility clothing or radio communication, are vital. Workers must be able to stop machinery if needed and ensure equipment is isolated before any maintenance. Following procedures, understanding shipboard operations, and staying alert at all times helps reduce the risk of being struck by moving objects.

EYE INJURIES

Many eye-injury cases have been reported, ranging from minor incidents to severe, life-changing injuries that left the affected people with permanent damage to their vision. Many accidents occurred in the engine room, but routine tasks such as sweeping, maintenance, or simply passing close to ongoing work also led to dust, particles or liquids entering the eyes, affecting crew of all ranks. Most cases involved a lack of proper PPE, often because the job was considered routine and the risk underestimated. Incidents typically fell into three categories: equipment failure causing fragments to strike the eye, solid particles entering the eye during everyday operations, and splashes from chemicals or other harmful liquids. Wearing the correct, well-maintained safety goggles or glasses, rather than relying on personal eyewear, greatly reduces the risk and severity of injury, making proper PPE and risk assessment essential for every task.

Maintaining strong health and safety practices at sea relies on recognising everyday risks, using the right equipment, and following established procedures with care and consistency. From preventing injuries to protecting long-term wellbeing, small actions, such as wearing proper PPE, planning tasks thoroughly, and reporting near misses, make a significant difference. Continued training and awareness are essential to keeping crews safe. For more guidance, resources, videos and training opportunities, readers are encouraged to visit the Britannia P&I Loss Prevention website at britanniapandi.com/loss-prevention/

BRITANNIA BRAIN WAVES

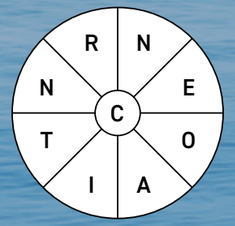
SHARPEN YOUR SKILLS WITH THESE NAUTICAL BRAIN TEASERS

SUDOKU

1	2			3				
5			1		4			
						5	9	
3	9							
							7	
			8	4	1			
	1	6	2					8
				8				2
		5	7					

WORDWHEEL PUZZLE

Create as many words as possible with the letters in the wordwheel. You can only use each letter once and every word must contain the letter in the centre of the wheel.



A LITTLE HELP TO FIND THE 9 LETTER WORD:
An object used on ships to transport goods.

The 9 letter word is:

WORD SEARCH

I	L	F	G	B	S	E	M	S	I	P	C	A	M	E	D	C	I
M	I	X	S	X	K	V	N	E	W	N	B	O	S	E	O	A	U
A	F	X	S	B	P	E	C	A	L	C	S	E	M	K	C	R	Z
R	E	D	A	R	R	S	J	F	V	M	O	U	N	P	K	G	B
I	B	V	F	E	O	S	D	A	C	I	A	V	R	G	A	O	A
T	O	O	E	R	P	E	U	R	R	J	G	S	E	A	I	S	F
I	A	Y	T	S	E	L	O	E	E	I	P	A	T	R	N	N	S
M	T	A	Y	T	L	I	Z	R	W	V	P	Q	T	Q	A	C	E
E	U	G	A	E	L	W	G	C	C	A	P	T	A	I	N	G	E
S	K	E	N	R	E	F	V	H	S	N	R	Y	C	R	O	B	E
P	O	R	T	N	R	Z	F	J	T	C	J	O	C	E	A	N	T
T	D	A	U	C	H	A	R	T	E	R	S	T	I	D	E	S	V

Find the following words in the puzzle. Words are hidden →, ↓, and ↘.

NAVIGATION
INSURANCE
PROPELLER
MARITIME
SEAFARER
COVERAGE
LIFEBOAT
FREIGHT
CHARTER
COMPASS
CAPTAIN
VESSEL
VOYAGE
ENGINE
SAFETY
CARGO
OCEAN
STERN
TIDES
CREW
PORT
DOCK
MAST

FOLLOW
BRITANNIA P&I

REGULAR UPDATES
MARITIME INFORMATION
INSIGHTFUL CONTENT

We hope you enjoyed this issue of Crew Watch. We are actively seeking ways to maintain and increase the usefulness, relevance, and overall appeal of our articles. If you have any ideas or comments, please send them to:
britanniacommunications@tindallriley.com

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