



THE SOUTHAMPTON MASTER MARINERS' CLUB

CONFIDENTIAL HAZARDOUS INCIDENT REPORTING PROGRAMME -C.H.I.R.P.

**A Report on the
TECHNICAL SEMINAR
held at the Southampton Club-room
on
Thursday 15th April 2004**

The speaker, Captain Mike Powell, Director (Maritime), The CHIRP Charitable Trust, was introduced by Captain Andrew Tinsley, Captain of The Southampton Master Mariners' Club. Mike went to sea in 1980 and after serving in a wide range of ships and trades was appointed to command at the early age of 28. His seafaring career ended in 1994. Currently, he is a non-practising Solicitor, Fellow of The Nautical Institute and a Warden of the Honourable Company of Master Mariners.

Mike opened by outlining the origins of CHIRP which stemmed from actions taken by the civil aviation industry following a series of air disasters in the mid 70's. Enquiries by the FAA revealed similarities in many of the events leading up to the disasters and this gave rise to the belief that people were reluctant, or afraid, to report operational or technical shortcomings lest their employment was threatened. Whilst companies had established reporting programmes they were, on occasions, simply not picking up key pieces of information. Today, CHIRP is an independent confidential and voluntary reporting programme for people employed, or having an active interest in, the aviation and maritime industries.

CHIRP has been in existence in the commercial air transport industry since 1982 but it was not until 2003 that it was introduced as a new safety concept in the maritime industry and it is that industrial aspect that was discussed that evening. The speaker stressed that it was not a "whistle blowing" exercise and that those reporting safety concerns could not remain anonymous - although their identity would be protected. It is intended to serve those having an active interest in the maritime industry - and leisure-related activities - and seeks to be "a new safety element to the maritime sector as an innovative way of promoting the improvements of its safety culture". Inter alia, it looks at badly framed legislation, errors of judgement and unsafe practices.

At the outset funding was a problem and despite recommendations in 1992 from The House of Lords regarding a "Maritime Safety Programme" and a stinging rebuke to HMG from Rear-Admiral John Lang, the (then) Chief Inspector of Marine Accidents, it was not until 2003 that the programme was launched and funded by the Department of Transport. The charitable status of the scheme ensures its impartiality in dealing with reports, irrespective of their origins.

In essence, CHIRP's functions are to accept reports from individuals pass these to companies for evaluation and action, if necessary and return these to the individual. The MAIB

and the MCA are frequently included in the chain of correspondence and through this process non-attributable safety information that might not otherwise enter the public domain is circulated throughout the industry. The scheme supplements rather than replaces company systems -the Nautical Institute MARS for one - and the reports currently enjoy a circulation in excess of 130,000.

Reports are made on standardised report forms or by fax-mail or in letter form. Telephone reports are accepted but these are expected to be supported subsequently by a written report. When a report has been received - by whatever means - the reporter is made aware of this and a check is made to ensure that nothing has been missed from the original report. Discussion within CHIRP decides on the appropriate course of action and this is agreed with the reporter before communicating with the third party. Nothing that might identify the reporter is communicated to that third party and indeed CHIRP undertakes " Our primary concern is to protect the identity of any individual reporting to us " but they stress that anonymous reports cannot be accepted as their veracity cannot be adequately validated.

Mike said that currently approximately one third of the reports originate from leisure sailors, one third from professionals and the balance from "shore support" sources.

He described a "hazardous incident" as an event leading to a real or potential exposure to injury, danger or loss and he deplored the recent loss of life associated with the failure of lifeboat release gear. The shortcomings of some manufacturers had been known in some circles for several years but "people had to die" before the industry was made aware of misgivings about the construction of this gear.

As a charity, CHIRP is administered by a Board of Trustees supported by a Maritime Advisory Board comprising many household names associated with the administration and regulation of maritime safety. They provide specialist advice to the Trustees and eventually liaise with Captain Powell on the best course of action relevant to the report under consideration.

Mike stressed that they could not become involved in matters relating to problems associated with terms and conditions of employment unless there was a clear link between these and safety issues. Most importantly, errors and mistakes are reported without apportioning blame.

After a brief break to replenish refreshments, Mike agreed to "field any questions" and a lively session - under the Chairmanship of Reg Kelso - ensued. These included the involvement of the RNLI, reports from non-UK ships without UK waters, lack of response from overseas operators, use of report detail as evidence in a Court of Law, was confidentiality totally assured?, the contribution that ship design (totally enclosed bridges that preclude the checking of compass errors) made to marine accidents and the involvement of Classification Societies - to mention but a few.

As time ran out, the Chairman called on Mr Walter Weyndling to summarise the content of an absorbing talk and discussion and to thank Captain Powell for coming so far, and for staying so late, to afford us this. Walter's suitably worded response was greeted with acclaim and the speaker was thanked in the traditional manner.

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