



Emergency preparedness on the PSC agenda

Muster lists lacking sufficient detail was one of the most notable deficiencies found by port state control regimes during their concentrated inspection campaign on emergency systems in 2019.

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A number of MOUs on port state control (PSC) carried out a joint concentrated inspection campaign (CIC) in 2019 focusing on readiness of ship and crew in an emergency. Our [alert of 29 July 2019](#) provides background information on the campaign as well as a copy of the tailored questionnaire used by attending PSC officers.

While the CIC results currently available demonstrate a fairly high level of compliance among ships inspected during the campaign period, the MOUs seem to agree on one thing. Question no.5 on the questionnaire: “*Does the muster list specify details in accordance with the requirements of SOLAS 1996-1998 Amendment, Chapter III, Regulation 37?*” yielded one of the most unfavourable results of the campaign. With 178 deficiencies related to muster lists, the [Tokyo MOU](#) even concluded that this was *the* most notable deficiency found during the campaign. Other MOUs, such as the Indian Ocean and Abuja, also observed that some crews were unfamiliar with the operation of their ships’ emergency equipment.

At the time of writing, the Paris MOU has not published its CIC results for 2019. However, its [online inspection results](#) for the campaign period seem to support those of other MOUs. Paris MOU member states recorded 201 deficiencies related to muster lists during the campaign period and a total of 407 for the whole of 2019. The figure below presents all deficiencies related to the category ‘04-Emergency Systems’ as recorded by Paris MOU member states between 1 September and 30 November 2019.

Operators and masters are advised to take note of the above PSC CIC results and make sure their ships’ muster lists are up to date and meet the requirements of SOLAS Reg.III/8 and Reg.III/37 by providing sufficiently detailed instructions for crews to respond effectively in a real emergency. On ships with significant numbers of non-English speaking crew members, the muster list should also include translations into the appropriate language or languages. Furthermore, masters should bear in mind that there is no substitute for onboard training and drills - everybody onboard must be familiar with the procedures to be followed, their duties and equipment to be used in an emergency.

Shipboard emergency plans

Shipboard emergency plans addressing different categories of emergencies are required under the provisions of both SOLAS and MARPOL and their importance are further emphasized under Section 8 of the ISM Code. An emergency plan is intended to assist personnel in dealing with an actual or potential incident. Its primary purpose is to set in motion the necessary actions to avoid or reduce the further escalation of an incident. Regardless of the magnitude of an incident, effective planning ensures that the necessary actions are taken in a structured, logical, safe, and timely manner.

The need for a predetermined and properly structured plan is clear in light of the pressures and multiple tasks facing personnel confronted with an emergency situation. In the heat of the moment, lack of planning will often result in confusion, mistakes, and a failure to advise key people. Delays will occur and time will be wasted; time during which the situation may well worsen. As a consequence, the ship and its crew may be exposed to greater hazards and more extensive environmental damage may result.

Important features of the muster list

The muster list makes up an important part of a ship’s overall emergency preparedness as it describes the duties to be carried out by each member of a ship’s crew in an emergency. Such duties include the preparation of survival crafts and other life-saving appliances, the closing of watertight and fire doors, and all other openings such as skylights, portholes and side scuttles and any openings in the hull. In addition, duties in connection with fire-fighting, the use of communication equipment and the equipping of survival craft must be included. Where passengers are carried onboard, the duties also include warning and assembling passengers,

controlling their movement, seeing that they are suitably dressed and wearing their lifejackets correctly.

The muster list must contain details of the general emergency alarm and other emergency signals and the corresponding action to be taken by the crew. Where appropriate, communication equipment, channels and reporting chain to be used during an abandonment or other emergency should be specified. How the order to abandon ship is to be given must be included, as must the survival craft or launching station to which each crew member is assigned. It must also show the name or rank of officers whose duty it is to ensure that the life-saving and fire-fighting appliances are always maintained ready for use.

The Master is ultimately responsible for compiling the muster list, keeping it up to date and ensuring that copies are exhibited in visible places throughout the ship, including the navigating bridge, engine room and crew accommodation. When compiling the muster list consideration should be given to the possibility of key persons being unable to carry out their emergency duties through injury or for some other reason, and provision made for substitutes. When allocating substitutes care should be exercised to ensure that emergency parties are not left without a leader or seriously undermanned.

The importance of training

Training and drills are an essential part of maintaining and improving emergency preparedness and the development of a safety culture rather than merely complying with the mandatory regulations. Training and drills involve familiarisation with the type of emergency scenarios that can occur and the related procedures and equipment, so that when the safety or security of persons, the ship and/or the maritime environment is at risk, the situation is managed in the best possible way. In a real emergency, when chaos threatens, people often become afraid. Experience shows that people who regularly train and exercise in the form of safety drills are less frightened, less prone to panicking, respond in a controlled manner, and handle the situation much better than before the training.

SOLAS Reg.III/19 requires emergency drills to be carried out at regular intervals and, as far as practicable, as if there were an actual emergency. It is also important to maintain records of the different steps followed by the crew while carrying out onboard drills and to follow-up with a debriefing session. A master should not be too concerned if mistakes are made during training and drills as it is the best opportunity for each crew member to learn from their mistakes and to improve their skills. Important lessons learned during drills will also help to further detail the instructions included in emergency plans. Remember, every second counts when the emergency alarm goes off!