Grounded container ship takes an extra beating from the weather

Investigator Training

EMSA is promoting the development of common standards and solutions for investigator training and qualification, and it is also developing and implementing a training plan which enables Member State training authorities to work with the EMCIP system. The main goal is to assist Member States in their efforts to implement best practice in a consistent way.

EMSA attaches much importance to the use of the Voyage Data Recorder (VDR), otherwise known as the 'black box,' and other electronic devices in accident investigation. These provide the possibility of accessing accurate information on the conversations and decisions involving different parties involved in an accident, as well as information on the position, direction, speed of the vessel, etc. Consequently, the main goal of the EMSA training activities is to support the consistent, effective build up of Member State capabilities associated with the retrieval, download and analysis of VDR data.

Looking to the Future

The most important future requirement is for all EU countries with a maritime interest to either have their own independent bodies to investigate accidents, or to have arrangements with other organisations to do so when appropriate. At the present time, only the minority of Member States have such capabilities or support arrangements, so EMSA will continue to play a role in assisting in their set up.

As EMSA is continuously developing and/or improving a growing number of EU maritime databases and systems, the intention is that aspects of EMCIP will progressively become more integrated with the respective elements of other EMSA systems. This may also apply to non-EU systems. For example, the possibility of transferring data directly from EMCIP to the IMO accident database is being explored, in order to avoid Member States having to feed data into both systems in parallel.

Looking to the longer term future, EMSA also participates in projects which will enable it to keep at the forefront of technical developments, and therefore enable it to move forward quickly and to recommend appropriate actions to other Member State accident investigation interests.

A Voyage Data Recorder

Further Information

The EMSA website contains further information on this and all the other activities of the Agency, and it can be accessed at: **http://www.emsa.europa.eu**

LEARNING LESSONS FROM ACCIDENTS

EUROPEAN MARITIME SAFETY AGENCY

THE **GLOBAL** ISSUES

Shipping is not only the backbone of the global economy, but it is also a significant growth sector, in particular because of the need to transport larger volumes of commodities and manufactured goods to the places where they are needed. The requirement to transport such volumes of goods, as well as large numbers of passengers, at competitive prices on board ships involves a certain amount of risk. Consequently, accidents occur from time to time and the challenge is to try to minimise their frequency and effect.

Erika oil tanker sinking

The European coastline is geographically complex and is affected by a large variety of weather conditions. In particular, the northern coast contains several sea areas where navigation can be extremely difficult in bad weather and the Atlantic coast has by far the most difficult sea conditions. In addition, economic growth has led to steady growth in the volume of shipping over the last twenty years, which has in turn led to higher traffic density in most sea areas. These factors have contributed to a number of disasters involving oil tankers and passenger ships in the region, and also to a large number of accidents and incidents involving other vessel types.

Over the last decade, due largely to improvements in ship design, construction, operation and other maritime safety measures, ship losses and accidental pollution have reduced significantly and EU waters have become generally safer. However, during the same time period, the overall number of casualties (such as collisions, groundings and fires) has increased. Bearing these things in mind, it is clear that maritime policy, legislation and resultant actions must focus on the changing scenario and, to do this, the authorities must be in possession of the best possible information. This means that the casualties and incidents which occur must be investigated effectively and consistently, and that the conclusions must be presented clearly so that the most appropriate safety related actions can be taken by decision makers. In this way, we can ensure that the effects of casualties overall reduce significantly alongside those of total losses in the future.

Although the requirement is clear, we are a long way from widespread implementation. A major concern in the international maritime sector is the inability of some flag states to carry out investigations following maritime accidents. Indeed, the countries under whose flags most accidents happen seem to be those which carry out proportionally the fewest investigations, or which disseminate the least information on findings and draw the fewest concrete conclusions from them. Consequently, international, regional and national bodies are attempting to rectify this situation. One of the ways of doing this is for investigation capabilities to be set up for all EU Member States in order to deal with accidents which occur in their waters, and with accidents involving ships flying their flags.

WHY IS THE WORK OF **EMSA** IMPORTANT?

The EU Level Requirement

The lessons learned from maritime disasters and lesser accidents have had a major impact on improvements in maritime safety over the years, but there are still many things to be done to improve the situation in the EU. At the present time, although there is extensive work done throughout the Community on the investigation of accidents, there are often significant differences in the ways in which the work is carried out. In some cases, investigations are carried out systematically, while in others, the approaches taken can be relatively non-systematic and often superficial. Also, many Member States do not have

Prestige oil tanker split in two

an investigative body. Therefore, one of the main tasks at EU level in this area, much of which is undertaken by EMSA on behalf of the European Commission, is to ensure the development of an effective, consistent Community-wide approach to for the investigation of accidents. This is being done in close cooperation with the Commission and the investigative authorities of the Member States.


Many accidents occur in difficult conditions

Central to the work is a proposal for a new EU Directive which is based on the following principles:

- The obligation to investigate very serious accidents.
- The independence of investigative bodies in carrying out their work.
- The requirement for good cooperation between Member States, and between Member States and the EU institutions.
- The requirement for accidents to be reported in an agreed way at Member State and EU levels.

The real challenge is to determine the most appropriate ways for data which deals with the causes, context descriptions, contributory factors and consequences to be collected and analysed. This will enable risks to be identified, recommendations to be made and appropriate measures to be implemented. Within this framework, the main elements of the EMSA work programme deal with: the set up of a marine casualty database (EMCIP); the introduction of an investigation methodology; the development of guidelines for investigators and; the provision of support in developing investigator training programmes in Member States.

EMCIP

EMSA is developing and implementing the European Marine Casualty Information Platform (EMCIP) with the goal of providing the European Commission and Member States with objective, reliable and comparable information on maritime accidents and incidents. The core of EMCIP is a database containing accident information provided by investigative bodies. These bodies supply data on individual accidents and incidents in accordance with the agreed rules, which enable consistent comparisons to be made. Once data is in the system, pre-installed search, analysis and information access tools facilitate the production of statistics and reports. These, in turn, provide improved input to safety policy, legislation, studies and other work at EU level and in the 27 EU/EEA Member States, Norway and Iceland. Using the EMCIP data, EMSA produces standardised European statistics in an agreed format. These are of particular importance, as it has never been possible to produce such statistics and reports before for input to decision making. The database itself has been set up by EMSA, who will also manage it on a day-to-day basis. EMCIP is web based, with a user friendly interface so that competent authorities can: provide input in an efficient manner and; have easy access to the system and its information for use in their daily work.

Development of a Methodology and Guidelines

It is essential that those who carry out accident investigations throughout the European Union undertake their work in a consistent and effective way. This ensures that high quality investigations are carried out with the aim of establishing the causes and circumstances, so that effective recommendations are developed to improve maritime safety, prevent pollution and reduce the risk of casualties. In cooperation with the Commission and Member States, EMSA is developing an investigation methodology, and is also promoting the introduction of guidelines for accident investigators which are based on best practice throughout the EU. Within this framework, it is also developing ways of training investigators. With respect to the development of guidelines, these are intended to provide investigative bodies, and their investigators, with guidance on the practical implementation of the main principles of accident investigations, as detailed within the methodology. The guidelines are based on best practice, and take into account experience within the sphere of maritime safety investigation, as well as in other sectors. Updated versions will be produced in response to expert advice as developments occur within the sphere of safety investigations and within the maritime industry.


Dealing with the after-effects of an accident