



IMPROVING THE APPLICATION OF THE COLREGS

Why this study?

By Captain Francis Baillod FNI
(Shipmaster with Suisse Atlantique and Fellow and Council Member of The Nautical Institute)

Photo courtesy The Swedish Club

The most objective evidence comes from The Nautical Institute's confidential Marine Accident Reporting Scheme (MARS). This scheme, which has been running for seven years, demonstrates that seventy four percent of all incidents or near incidents reported relate to uncertainty, violations and disregard for the COLREGS.

The UK P&I Club, in their Analysis of Major Claims ten year trends, confirm that deck officer and pilot error account for 83% of major collisions. The average claim is \$500,000 but, as every master knows, the effect of pollution can increase the consequential loss considerably.

During my 38 years at sea, with 20 in command, I have sailed with officers of various seagoing nationalities and to suggest that there is a simple explanation for all collisions would be quite inappropriate. The issues are complex and deep seated.

These are just some of the problems I have met, either personally or indirectly. Lack of watchkeeping discipline, inadequate manning, distraction by administrative chores, lack of awareness and poor seamanship, fatigue, reluctance of OOWs to manage speed, too many bridge alarms, varying training standards, reluctance of junior officers to take advice, insufficient training and experience, aggression and frustration, over-reliance on electronic equipment, failure to call the master in good time, improper confidence levels, ignorance, misinterpretation or confusion and commercial pressure. Culture and language difficulties also play a part when interpreting and discussing traffic situations on the bridge.

So there will be no easy panacea, and the problems cannot be confined because ships move and interact. That is why I wish to initiate this global study into the application of the COLREGS. It will be a major undertaking but I believe the project is very important.

Increasingly I am coming to the conclusion that as a profession we will have to take more direct responsibility for our bridge culture.

The Project

Aim:

To improve collision avoidance at sea.

Objectives:

- Conduct an international survey amongst sea staff, training staff and examiners to discover what are the norms, problems, and influences which affect decisions taken on the bridge.
- Conduct a selected number of in-depth interviews in different countries with personnel in each of the above categories.
- Compare the results within and between the main groups.
- Hold a number of workshops in maritime centres to discuss the results and find improvements.
- Derive conclusions concerning weaknesses in the present arrangements and measures which might be taken to overcome them.
- Test the conclusions with representative control groups and more widely via the Institute's journal and other relevant media.
- Publish recommendations and seek support for improved watch-keeping practices.

Resources:

- The project requires the preparation, dissemination and analysis of a questionnaire which may be conducted in more than one language. Evaluation will be carried out through workshops in differing international locations. A major commitment to communicating the results and seeking support for change will also be required. Council intends to involve P&I Clubs and other industry organisations.