

Tor-Chr. Mathiesen: “We have to get the ISM Code in from the cold”

More than 6 months have passed since the “Erika” accident took place. The accident has fuelled an intense discussion within the industry including participation by the various actors on the shipping scene. Many proposals have been put forward by governments and industry bodies. It is tempting to enter into this discussion now, however, I will limit myself to an issue which seems to be completely ignored or forgotten; namely the ISM Code.

I believe that most professional people within the industry – not the politicians – believe and agree that the root cause of the problem does not lie in the lack of adequate regulations, but in lack of compliance with all the regulations that we have. But what are the measures suggested to cope with the non-compliance. They go into either of the three categories:

- i Tightening of existing inspections
- ii Introduction of additional inspections
- iii Introduction of more transparency

Certainly many of the measures are well-founded and should be followed up. Though it is believed that some will only create extra burdens with little effect. What are also the chances that new additional regulations will be complied with to a higher degree than the existing.

The objective of the ISM Code was also to attack the root problem of the industry, namely lack of compliance with existing regulations and inadequate operational practice. Since middle of the 80'ties and at least up till 1st July, 1998, the Code was seen as the most proactive instrument to meet increasing expectations to safe operation and pollution prevention. This was due to an increasing recognition that the most lasting effect would be to address the human element in its widest sense including safety management, rather than introducing more inspections and more control which are less cost-efficient.

Why this lack of focus on the ISM Code and its implementation. Well, I believe it is because we still are a disaster driven industry characterised by a blame culture. The Erika accident is not acceptable and require reactions, but why leave the ISM Code out in the cold. Why not start in parallel a campaign addressing the Code under the objective; “What have we learnt and what can we improve?” Certainly the implementation of the Code will take time before we see the effects throughout the industry, but that will also be the case with more regulations – at an higher expense.

However, not recognising that the basic cause of the root problem is lack of management control.