

A (vetting) inspector calls

➔ Fifty members and guests gathered to hear Captain Shiraz Mogul AFNI, Manager of PacMarine Services (HK), give an insider's perspective on preparation for vetting inspections.

In a practical and useful talk, Captain Mogul described how vetting inspections were introduced in response to some famous maritime disasters, and asked whether they are essential, or just a waste of time. In his view, they are now commercially essential because acceptance by one or more vetting organisations is a requirement in many contracts, while failures can lead to the loss of a charter and affect not just the vessel concerned, but an entire fleet. He also pointed out that vetting acceptance by one inspecting party does not mean acceptance by all the other parties.

Among the advice to companies whose vessels are to be vetted, Captain Mogul stressed the need to get the inspector aboard without delays or aggravations during the journey to the vessel. Crews need to be proactive, plan well, know the checklist requirements and be as helpful as possible. He stressed the benefits of an initial meeting attended by all key personnel, and the importance of devising an acceptable inspection sequence which will cause the minimum amount of disruption to the vessel's operations. Above all, he said the ship's staff must speak up if there is a problem, be honest about deficiencies, and not be afraid to tell the inspector if they think he has made a mistake. The objective should be to get the inspector off the ship as quickly as possible, but that will not happen if he is rendered grumpy or suspects that anything is being covered up.

The quickest way to see the back of an inspector is to display a sound knowledge of your vessel and its safety management system, and to provide all the information required (but no more).

Among the most common causes of deficiencies are poor maintenance and housekeeping, poor procedures and inadequate training of key personnel.

As an experienced inspector, Captain Mogul said he always asks himself 'Would I be happy sailing on this ship as a supernumerary with no control over how it is run?' If the answer is yes, there are unlikely to be any major problems on board which would adversely affect the outcome of the inspection.

On the vexed question of whether the company should send a superintendent to witness an inspection, Captain Mogul said their presence can be a mixed blessing, and is not always helpful. In his opinion, if they do attend they should never interfere.

At the closing meeting to discuss the inspector's findings, the ship's staff should never beg or cajole, but should speak up if they feel there is a mistake in the findings.

With a large number of ship managers in the audience who obviously had strong views on vetting inspections, there was an extremely lively question and answer session.

Captain Alan Loynd FNI