

TITLE:	KEEPING A PROPER LOOKOUT	DATE	13/06/2005
CATEGORY:	NAVIGATION	AREA:	WORLDWIDE

The single most important factor in ship operations which give rise to claims involving collisions and groundings is the failure to keep a proper lookout.

The International Rules for the Prevention of Collisions at Sea (1972, as amended) are quite clear as to the legal requirement for maintaining a lookout. The relevant rule states:-

Rule 5

Every vessel shall at all times maintain a proper lookout by sight and hearing as well as by all available means appropriate in the prevailing conditions so as to make a full appraisal of the situation and of the risk of collision.

Chapter A – VIII/2 part 3 of the STCW95 Code details the principles to be taken into account when setting watches.

The Club firmly believes that keeping a proper lookout in accordance with the regulations is paramount to the safety of the vessel, her crew and cargo and must take precedence over any commercial considerations.

The value of keeping a proper lookout is not always fully appreciated, especially in these times of ever decreasing crew numbers. It is one aspect of the vessel's operation that is not perceived as being productive. Masters can find themselves under immense pressure to achieve maintenance or operational goals, and this can be at the expense of keeping a lookout.

Workloads on the Officer on Watch are increasing and fatigue is now a major factor governing the efficiency of the watch. Navigating in confined and busy waters following port calls places a heavy burden on the vessel's staff raising the importance of the additional lookout even further.

Whilst recognising the difficulties, Masters are advised to pre-plan the deployment of crew ahead of periods of heavy workloads so as to ensure an efficient bridge watch is maintained. Consideration should also be given to ensuring the bridge team is suitably experienced for the area being navigated. Instances have occurred when Masters have left the bridge in the sole charge of an inexperienced watch keeper whilst navigating in the confines of very busy waterways.

For vessels falling within the scope of SOLAS, the minimum manning level is governed by the Minimum Safe Manning Certificate issued by the Flag State. The Club has vessels entered that fall both within and outside the SOLAS regulations. In each case the onus is on the vessel's operator to ensure that crew numbers are sufficient for the vessel's safe operation and on Masters to ensure the watch keepers are not subjected to undue fatigue.

The requirement of the Safe Manning Certificate if it applies, is for the absolute minimum number of crew required to operate the vessel safely under normal conditions and should not be construed as the proper manning level. Work loads on board do vary and consideration should be given to increase the on-board numbers whenever the safety of the vessel could be compromised. This is particularly important where vessels are engaged in specialist operations when crew are required to undertake duties over and above navigational and maintenance requirements.

A tired crew is not dependent upon ship type or size but the number of hours worked.