

01050.GEN - Annual fleet letter

01050.GEN - January 1, 2001

May I be one of the first to wish you a Happy New Year! As you may recall from previous letters, at the beginning of each year I recap the past year's activity from the registry's perspective, and then look to the future.

Firstly, and very proudly, I can advise that in 2001 we will celebrate the 20th anniversary of the ship registry. The registry's excellent record, when considering port state control detentions, accidents, injuries, deaths and pollution incidents, evidences its commitment to safety.

Vanuatu's Port State Control detention rates show continuous improvement. We recorded zero detentions in the United States in the year 2000 and only two detentions in the Paris MOU area. Although it is too soon to predict with certainty, we believe Vanuatu will not be included in the next US Coast Guard "boarding matrix."

Safety inspections continued at a rate similar to 1999. With only a few exceptions, the number of deficiencies per vessel declined.

I am happy to state that Vanuatu is on the STCW "white list." My personal and heartfelt thanks go to Dr. James Cowley for his efforts and assistance in this regard. Vanuatu is also one of only 24 administrations to have completed the IMO self-assessment, again, with thanks to Dr. Cowley.

During 2000 VMSL was re-certified in compliance with ISO 9002; we were not bitten by the millennium bug; there were only three alleged minor pollution incidents fleet wide (one of which was unproven); and there were no traffic separation scheme or radio regulation violations.

Yet even with these positive results, we must report the loss of a pleasure yacht and a small tug, both as the result of engine fires and subsequent sinking: there were no deaths or injuries in either case. Elsewhere in the fleet, there were two deaths: one seafarer fell overboard while monitoring an offshore lightering operation and an industrial worker was crushed in a freak accident on a MODU.

Last year I reported that a large number of fraudulent certificates were discovered during the document application process. I am happy to say those numbers have dropped during 2000: maybe the message is getting out. We have worked with a number of other administrations where criminal investigations have commenced and regularly share information with a network of open and traditional registries.

There were no safety seminars held in 2000 but we will be back on track to schedule these for 2001 including possibly another swing through the Far East -- scheduled around the next MAIIF meeting in Korea during October 2001 -- and perhaps southeast Asia or southwest Pacific.

The number of false EPIRB alerts remained high -- averaging more than two per month. In five out of the last eight cases, vessels had been deleted from the registry. In another case the EPIRB was miscoded:

the vessel has yet to be identified. See Fleet Safety Letter 00049.SEL. A reminder: if your vessels leave the fleet, they must have their EPIRBs recoded immediately. See the appended list of the year 2000 false alerts.

Let's look ahead to the coming year and beyond:

The STCW 95 transitional period ends 31 January 2002. Many provisions, such as the rest provisions, basic safety training requirements, etc., are in force now and are being monitored by PSC officers.

The ISM Code becomes mandatory for most other vessels on 1 July 2002.

All licensed officers must have valid original Vanuatu licenses with them on board ship at all times. Officers applying for licenses are required to know the legislation and regulations affecting them as Vanuatu licensed officers. Ask for a copy of Maritime Bulletin # 108 if you do not have one.

Realistic drills must be conducted weekly. Lifeboats must be launched, line throwing device instructions given, and steering gear drills conducted and logged quarterly.

False EPIRB alerts are costly: costs incurred by this office to respond to these, including charges for staff time, will be passed on to the owners. EPIRBs are still being found improperly coded.

Marine casualties must be reported immediately. See the Vanuatu Maritime Regulations.

While Port State Control statistics have improved, let's not be complacent.

Each Vanuatu vessel is subject to a safety inspection at any time. If your vessels are due for inspections, or were not inspected in 2000, please provide their itineraries to this office.

Please immediately notify this office if one of your vessels has been detained by a Port State Control officer or is alleged to have violated the IMO Routeing Schemes, the Collision Regulations, the ITU Radio Regulations, or fishing treaties or conventions.

Each manned vessel must have a minimum safe manning certificate. For self propelled vessels, these must be updated if they do not already address GMDSS or STCW requirements.

Vanuatu's agreements with IACS Class Societies allow class surveyors free access.

Best wishes for a safe & prosperous year 2001 !

Donald J. Sheetz

Executive Vice President