Neil Ellis of the Seafarers International Research Centre shines some light on the role of maritime research and explains why their work is important to seafarers.

Why should seafarers care about what researchers do?

Researchers in the maritime sector come from a variety of backgrounds. Some are from academic institutes which conduct research within the industry. These researchers, such as those at the Seafarers International Research Centre (SIRC), may have been seafarers themselves before qualifying as researchers and beginning a new research-based career. Alternatively, they may have come from a traditional academic background and have developed an interest in the maritime sector.

There is no limit to what such researchers may take an interest in. However, those at SIRC, where I work, are interested in a very broad range of topics, from health and safety to the effects of legislation on the transport of hazardous chemicals at sea. Literature is a key part of our research. We consider the existing stress prevention techniques for a range of employment sectors such as small business and vocational educational training institutes, as well as investigating questions asking about a wide range of issues concerning fatigue, such as working patterns and leave in relation to the exposure of seafarers to hazardous chemicals at sea. The study was conducted by Professor David Walters, and it used a mixture of research methods to look at seafarers’ exposure to hazardous chemicals on cargo ships, and the effectiveness of risk management in relation to the transport of hazardous materials by sea. Literature from academic and scientific sources on issues of chemical risk management in other industries was reviewed in order to draw parallels with the maritime industry as well as to make recommendations for safe practices. This was also supported by interviews with people in both the maritime industry and the chemical industry.

Finally, the project that I am currently working on very much depends upon input from fleet personnel managers. It is the Lloyd’s Register Educational Trust-funded Training and Technology Project and is part of a series of studies being undertaken at the Lloyd’s Register Educational Trust Research Unit. This project is concerned with the training needs for seafarers when new technologies and equipment are introduced on vessels. A number of different research methods have been used within this project, including interviews with seafarers about how new technologies are introduced on board, training received, and access to training.

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