
**Industry Expertise:
Loss Prevention**

Seafarer Wellbeing Series: A discussion with ISWAN Q&As

Standard Club has produced this Q&A sheet to respond to questions received by attendees of the webinar 'Standard Club Seafarer Wellbeing Series: A discussion with ISWAN'.

Answers are offered by hosts of the webinar.

Should you wish to discuss any further queries regarding seafarer wellbeing from a club perspective, please contact Captain Yves Vandeborn. If you wish to receive further support from ISWAN please visit www.seafarerhelp.org



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Q: One of the biggest issues that seafarers are facing at the moment is the lack of crew changes. How can governments be encouraged to declare seafarers as “key workers” or essential personnel, which could exempt them from travel restrictions, allowing crew changes to go ahead?

YV: A lot of effort has been made by the IMO, ITF, ICS and many other international maritime bodies to push Flag States to categorise seafarers as key workers and facilitate crew changes. This culminated in the recently published guidelines by the IMO. It now remains up to individual Flag States to incorporate these guidelines into national law as the IMO has no power to force signatory states. National shipping associations can assist with this process by having an open dialogue between the Flag State, Unions and Ship Owners Associations. It will remain difficult to carry out crew changes unless airline operators cooperate to organise flights to the major crewing countries.

CV: In addition to Yves comments, the theme for this year’s IMO Day of the Seafarer (25th June) is seafarers are key workers. Hopefully, this will contribute to efforts to help governments to recognise this.

Q: Are the majority of inquiries to ISWAN today coming from mariners ashore or on board?

CV: There is a real mix, almost half of the enquiries are coming from seafarers on board vessels, the rest are seafarers (and their families) ashore.

Q: Can any seafarer seek assistance from ISWAN irrespective of their employers?

CV: Yes, ISWAN is available for seafarers working in all sectors as well as their family members.

Q: Do employment contracts and/or P&I covers in existence provision for force majeure situations such as the current pandemic? If not, how would seafarers be covered whilst on duty?

JB: Expenses and liabilities incurred by members in relation to a crewmember who is ill or dies due to COVID-19 during his/her period of employment will be treated in the same way as any other crew illness or death claim. There are no exclusions from cover for COVID-19 related crew illnesses or deaths. Where a vessel is required to divert to obtain medical treatment ashore for a crewmember who has contracted COVID-19 the net costs to the member in respect of port charges, fuel, insurance, wages, stores and provisions incurred for the purposes of the diversion are covered.

However, where there has been no outbreak on board, and the crew are not ill, repatriation is an operational expense and is not covered unless the crew contract provides that the members are obliged to repatriate the crewmember in such precautionary circumstances and the club has previously approved the contract. Similarly, if crew are quarantined by a port authority where there is no outbreak of COVID-19, the costs of replacement crew would not fall within club cover. These would be operational expenses.

If a crewmember contracts COVID-19 when leaving from or returning to his/her country of origin, but not due to an outbreak on board, the member may still be responsible for the crewmember. Members are likely to be responsible for the crewmember’s health and safety during their outward and return journeys from/to their homeland subject to the terms of the crew employment contract. Where such responsibility exists, any claim for expenses and liabilities that arise from this crewmember’s illness during or arising from that period are recoverable from the club. Where member extend the contracts of employment of the serving crew due to COVID-19 or travel restrictions, provided the contracts are validly and legally extended, members remain covered for the usual risks such as crew injury, illness or death and consequential repatriation.

Q: Cadets/Students in maritime colleges are soon to be seafarers and have some serious doubts about their future and little knowledge of the future shipping scenario. Considering they are the future and although we support them in whichever way we can, we think they too need larger inclusion and attention.

YV: I think it is vitally important to ensure that cadets are motivated to go to sea. They should not only look at the negative aspects that are in the news, but also focus on the many positive items that are not often described in the news.

It is incredibly important for maritime universities to organise events such as the one organised annually by Capt Shorey, to bring together cadets in a fun way and still provide training to them, for example on physical/mental wellbeing.

Larger shipping companies already engage directly with maritime universities for the employment of cadets into their fleet, they also can organise events to bring together seafarers and let the cadets learn first-hand about the positive aspects of this great profession.

Q: I haven't seen any ship in the last 5 years that does not have internet connection for seafarers?

YV: I wish that were the reality, but unfortunately internet access differs vastly from ship to ship. Some ships will have Wi-Fi available to seafarers and even allow video calls. At the other end of the spectrum, some companies only provide email access to seafarers.

Even with the generous discounts provided during this period by Inmarsat, this does not benefit the crew if the ship does not have the necessary equipment on board.

There is also a big difference for a seafarer's mental wellbeing when they only can email their family at home compared with being able to video chat with them.

Q: How do you recommend we educate the cadets who are already on board about these unprecedented & challenging times.

YV: I would not distinguish between cadets or other crew when communicating about the current pandemic. Open and clear communication is the most important, regardless of rank.

Q: The plight of cruise ships and the awful situations faced by seafarers on cruise ships is in the news in the UK a lot at the moment including reported incidence of suicide for those stuck on board indefinitely with no pay in some cases. Is ISWAN assisting crew and the contractors on board cruise ships at the moment? Do ISWAN have any influence with governments to assist repatriations?

CV: We are dealing with cases of seafarers on board cruise ships and our regional teams are working with government bodies to assist with repatriations. We are working with partners at present to look at what more we can do to help seafarers on board cruise ships.

Q: Just a comment really – we should not equate mental health with mental illness. We can talk about physical health without talking about heart attacks and diabetes – we should be able to talk about mental health without talking about “illnesses and conditions”. Mental health is everyone's everyday business.

YV: Very good point. The taboo surrounding talking about mental health should be taken away and people should be able to talk openly about this topic.

CV: ISWAN have produced a number of resources which offer strategies and practical guidance on improving mental wellbeing, in the same way we might eat healthily or exercise to stay physically healthy. 'Steps to Positive Mental Health' offers tips on how to prepare for or respond to challenges and 'Psychological Wellbeing at Sea' offers guidance on improvements seafarers can make to all aspects of their wellbeing including strengthening relationships on board and at home, and responding better to stressful situations. All resources are available here:
<https://www.seafarerswelfare.org/seafarer-health-information-programme/good-mental-health>

Q: “Post Pandemic” seems a bit unrealistic at the present time. What improvements can be done in helping the seafarers to be more resilient and mentally strong?

CV: The resources I mentioned above can be really helpful for seafarers who need guidance on managing their mental health during this time. It is also important the companies are keeping in regular contact with their seafarers to see what might help them get through this. For example, could their internet access be improved, or can the company help to facilitate better social activities?

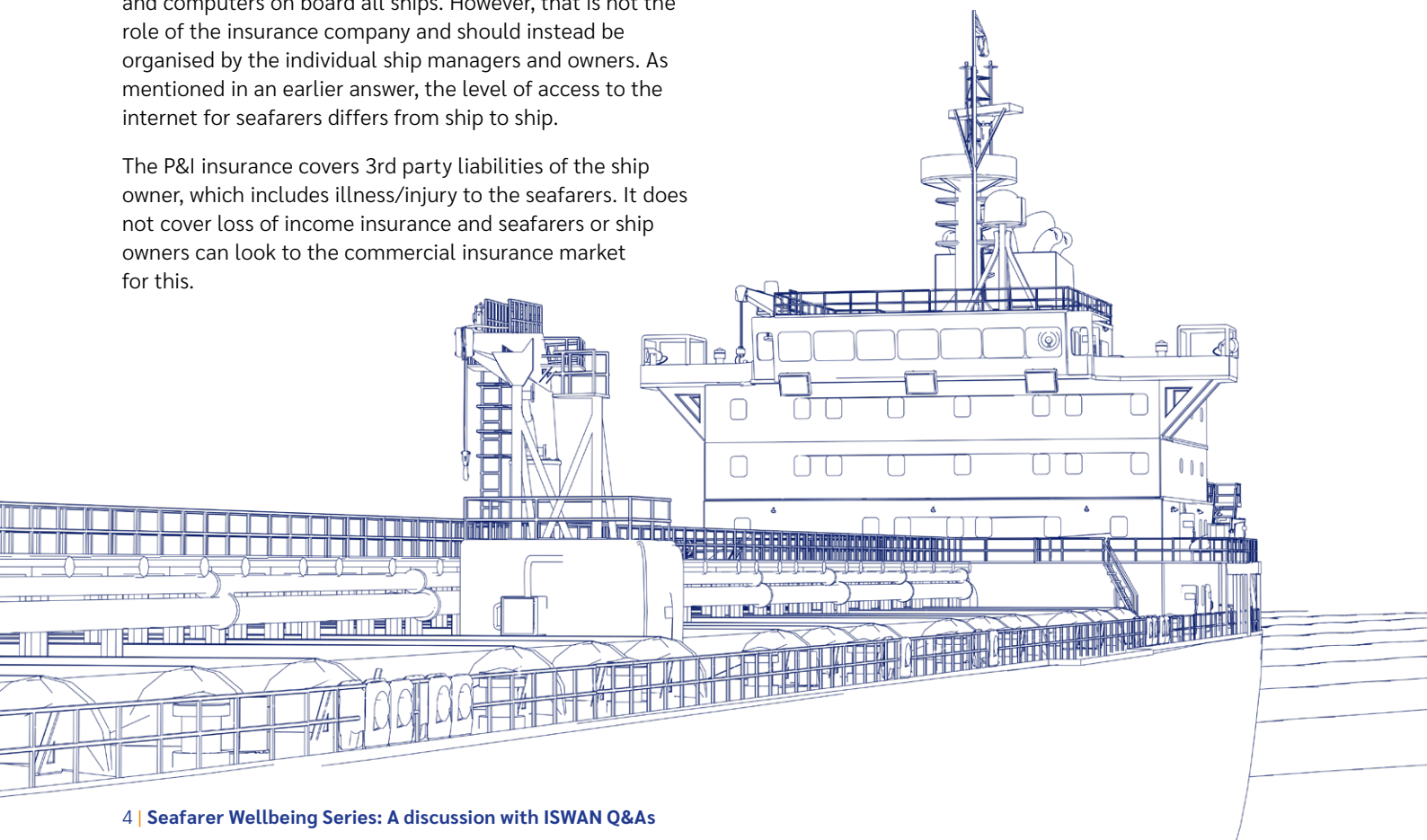
Q: One of the biggest difficulties for those at sea on cargo ships, not so much pax ships, is the difficulties they experience when trying to communicate with family. Is it possible for P&I clubs to implement computers and internet connection onboard? In most cases they are not provided. For those ashore, is it possible to add an insurance coverage in case of job loss due to the drop of maritime business volume?

YV: It would be great if P&I clubs could provide for internet and computers on board all ships. However, that is not the role of the insurance company and should instead be organised by the individual ship managers and owners. As mentioned in an earlier answer, the level of access to the internet for seafarers differs from ship to ship.

The P&I insurance covers 3rd party liabilities of the ship owner, which includes illness/injury to the seafarers. It does not cover loss of income insurance and seafarers or ship owners can look to the commercial insurance market for this.

Q: We hear a lot about telemedicine initiatives; however, we do not see much action or implementation around the same. Is it because of lack of connectivity and hesitance from shipowners and ship managers to invest in satcom packages?

YV: There is certainly an investment involved for a ship owner/manager to sign up to enhanced tele-medicine packages which require high-speed internet access. However, there are also several simpler packages available that provide for telemedicine in case of an injury on board. Other services are available by companies such as ISWAN for seafarers to call and have a confidential chat about their problems.



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