

Safe Navigation And Importance Of Voyage Plan

Nowadays, vessels are equipped with the most advanced electronic aids to navigation as the technology allows, this however cannot prevent marine accidents completely.



To minimize the marine accident risks, these are mainly related to the aforementioned processes;

- complying with local and international rules in terms of navigation safety,
- use of devices that are maintained within a plan and that work properly and
- formation of the crew working onboard with well trained and competent staff.

As it is well known, the voyage plan is the most important resource that is prepared where various information from many different sources is gathered and it should be followed carefully throughout the voyage to complete her journey safely from departure to destination. Likewise, the voyage plan should be prepared in accordance with the relevant rules and regulations and in the light of accurate information. Preparation of the voyage plan is standardized by the International Conventions for the Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS)¹ and Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping for Seafarers (STCW)². Besides, other auxiliary publications and resources³ of the International Maritime Organization (IMO) also ensure that the voyage plan to be prepared accurately and effectively.

In brief; the current Voyage Planning regulations obligate the application of four interactive stages:

1. **Assessment:** It is the stage of gathering all available information concerning the intended navigating area and deciding on the most suitable passage in terms of navigational safety by considering all existing and potential risks and dangers between the port of departure and port of destination. At this stage, ship characteristics, carried cargo on board, environmental and meteorological factors, local and international rules, company rules and regulations, and other factors that may affect the safety of navigation should be taken into consideration.

2. **Planning:** The intended voyage plan at this stage is drawn on appropriate scaled charts and all other necessary information is to be recorded as well. Apart from the sailing charts, other nautical publications should also be accessible for ease of watchkeeping officers' reference. The voyage plan should be prepared berth – to – berth and should include the navigation areas under pilotage too. It is worth mentioning that this issue (berth – to – berth) has been



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Captain Cankut Küçüktürk has joined Türk P&I Team on August 2020. Once graduated from Deck Department of ITU Maritime Faculty, Capt. Kucukturk started his sea career as Deck Officer and served on board various types and sizes of vessels for 12 years up to the rank of Ocean-Going Master Mariner. In 2010, he joined Kalimbassieris Maritime as Marine Surveyor and Claims Handler for damage, loss and casualty cases on behalf of P&I, H&M Clubs and other marine insurance companies. Additionally, he performed loss prevention surveys, inspections and audits for various Clubs and Flag States. In 2018, he joined Marsh Insurance Broker and Risk Management as Senior Manager, VP in Placement Department.



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in discussion for many years, however, marine accidents are still experienced during sailing under the pilot conn due to incomplete and/or inadequate voyage plans.

3. Executing: It is the stage of executing the voyage plan by watchkeeping officers. The plan should be implemented by the master and officers in charge. During performing of the voyage, prevailing conditions should be taking into consideration at all times. The master is obliged to check that the plan is always in force and in use.

4. Monitoring: Safe navigation can only be maintained with close and continuous monitoring of the plan. Thus, the vessel's progress on the route should be monitored during the voyage. The predicted and encountered conditions should be compared by the master and watchkeeping officers. In case of inconsistency, the plan should be reinterpreted and changed where it is deemed necessary.

Any negligence and/or omitting during performing the aforementioned stages with the contribution of other negative factors can cause serious loss of life and property, as well as extensive harm to the marine environment. Various cases in the past had revealed that the disruptions in the voyage plan had caused suppressing safety of navigation and consequently experienced many undesirable consequences.

In May 2011, a general average was declared due to the \$ 13 million cost incurred as a result of the grounding of a container ship, departed from Xiamen Port, China immediately after departure with approximately 8,950 TEU cargo and 8,000 tons of fuel. As a result of the investigation, it was concluded that the sailing chart in use for the area was not updated in accordance with the latest notice to mariners and that the voyage plan was incomplete. Some of cargo-interests who have been invited for contributing to general average brought the matter to trial and court decided that a defective voyage plan would mean that the vessel was not seaworthy at the time of departure. Thus, plaintiff (cargo-interests) would not be included in general average. The case is currently under discussions as per Hague-Visby Rules and still considered by the competent court. Once the legal process is completed, it may also be considered as probable that the insured is not considered under coverage for the aforementioned reason and may suffer grievance during compensation procedures.

Besides, defective voyage plan would affect adversely trading of the vessels even as any accident/loss has not occurred. For instance, some countries who are signatories of Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) monitors vessels' route tracks particularly in the traffic separation zones of inland waters, and the vessels acting in violation of the International Regulations for Preventing Collision at Sea (COLREG) are subject to enhanced controls by Port State on arrival of her first destination port(s). In case of determining any defect on the voyage plan during the controls, the vessel may be under a risk of arrest and master may personally be punished with considerable fines.

The above examples demonstrate that omission on the voyage plan can cause problems on a wide range difficulty from the arrest and fines of the vessels to raising discussions whether the vessels are seaworthy or not.

Needless to say that the matter is of great importance from insurance point of view as well. Casualties caused by violations of navigation safety and defective voyage plans also increase insurance costs and cause serious financial burden for both insured and insurance companies. Thus, the matter is also taken into account during risk assessments of fleets that have previously experienced such damages.

In this respect, we as TPI Insurance recommend our insureds to ensure their navigational devices are always in good working condition, perform all navigation devices and navigational aids maintenance and services on due time, keep corrected up to date all kind of nautical publications, particularly sailing charts which are one of the main instruments of navigation safety.

¹ SOLAS Chapter 5, Annexes 24 & 25

² STCW Convention, Section A-VIII/2, Part 2 (Voyage Planning)

³ IMO RESOLUTION A.893(21) adopted on 25 November 1999 (Guidelines for Voyage Planning)