

Forgotten in the Pandemic, Our Seafarers Trapped in Ships!

The importance of maritime transport has emerged during this pandemic period. About 90 percent of global trade is carried out through maritime transport, thanks to two million seafarers in working life.

Normally, approximately 100,000 seafarers rotate in a one-month period, however, these crew changes have been suspended because of the port and travel restrictions due to COVID-19. While we are safe in our homes with our loved ones, there are approximately 150,000 seafarers waiting on their ships to go home due to expired business contracts.



Many seafarers have not seen their families for several weeks and months. They want to go home but they must keep working. They are feeling helpless and sadly useless to their families as the distance between them is felt more acutely than ever. According to the special COVID-19 edition of the Seafarers' Happiness Index report the overall happiness level of seafarers has dropped to 6.30 in the first quarter of 2020, from 6.39 since 4th quarter of 2019 with concerns about health and welfare. Although there are many factors effecting happiness onboard, the main reasons in these unpredicted days are shore leave restrictions, limited social activity, and contact with other seafarers to maintain social distance, and inability to reach out their loved ones.

COVID-19 movement restrictions cause seafarers to face additional workloads, such as cleaning and disinfection of the living quarters of the ship, due to their long stay on the ships.

Even in normal times, while there are usually few opportunities for social interaction on board, the seafarers have nothing to entertain during these difficult days. They just work, eat, and then rest in their cabin. They chat with their families or watch movies in their cabins with everyone's own personal communication devices. They feel unhappy and lonely. The absence of environments where they can go ashore and relax and distract them affects their mental states negatively.

In studies conducted, it is clearly stated that irregular and long working hours have negative effects on physical, emotional, and mental fatigue. Ship operators should apply flexibility during working hours and consider the mental health and well-being of seafarers. Increasing workload, extended contracts, and increased stress to provide isolation make seafarers feel stressed, worried, and homesick. Negative mood becomes the risk for the safety and work quality of the ship.



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Our advices to our policy holders ;

- * Given the nature of the Covid 19 pandemic, it is very important to raise the awareness amongst crew members so that they are aware of the risks, how the virus can be spread, and precautions to be taken.
- * The IMO has endorsed new protocols designed to lift barriers to crew changes. We invite our assureds to review IMO's Briefing dated 07/05/2020.
- * ICS published a guideline for ship operators, explaining the right protection measures for Covid 19 outbreak and how to react when a case occurs on board. ICS also released posters that can be placed on ships for information purposes. Ship operators should inform the crew about how to deal with illnesses or what to do if a suspect occurs on the board the ship.
- * Implementation of IMO, ICS and ITF guidelines onboard.
- * Preparing readily available Covid 19 contingency plan onboard.
- * Arranging training courses onboard about epidemic prevention and control in a timely manner
- * Ensuring that communication channels are easily available so that seafarers can communicate with their families without interruption
- * Arranging increased internet bandwidth on ships and provide phonecards/credits
- * Raising the standard of catering and store
- * Ensuring open communication, the seafarers need to be able to know what is happening
- * Ensuring availability of medications
- * Ensuring that adequate materials such as protective equipment (PPE) and disinfectant necessary for food and personal protection are available on board
- * Running a COVID-19 emergency drill to check the vessel's capability to respond to a suspected COVID-19 case.
- * Formulating a crew changing plan
- * Carrying out a risk assessment with a view to minimize the risk of epidemic transmission.
- * Assigning a dedicated person to take temperature of seafarers twice a day (in the morning and evening) The measurement results should be recorded and archived.

The current situation has shown that there are serious difficulties in keeping seafarers happy and welfare. Seafarers are not alone during this pandemic, and many helplines have been created for them and their families.

We recommend our policy holders to review and evaluate our recommendations above. It is vital to remain calm and strong during these stormy days. As Turk P&I, we thank our seafarers, our secret heroes at sea, and appreciate their patience.