

CREW HEALTH ADVICE

# Eliminating shipboard bullying and harassment

The Maritime Labour Convention (MLC) recognised the negative effect that bullying and harassment can have on seafarer health and wellbeing, and have voted to bring these serious issues under Regulation 4.3 – the health and safety protection and accident protection code.

Three changes have been made:

1. the latest version of the guidance on eliminating shipboard harassment and bullying is to be taken into account (jointly published by the International Chamber of Shipping and the International Transport Workers Federation).
2. in addition to the various health and safety matters, ‘harassment and bullying’ has now been taken into account for the various health and safety matters of the MLC.
3. to the list of matters which should be considered for investigation in a health and safety context, ‘problems arising from harassment and bullying’ has been added.

Seafaring has long been considered a tough occupation due to the masculine nature of the profession and the rough conditions that prevail at sea. Seafarers are often perceived as ‘tough people’ in the field, but contrary to this biased perception, a previous Sailors’ Society report in 2016 revealed that out of a study of more than 1,000 seafarers, 25 percent reported that they have experienced depressive symptoms over a two week period, while 45 percent did not ask for help. Seafarers are not invincible to adversities; they are just as vulnerable to psychological distress as the general population.

Over the past decade, considerable observed evidence reports that workplace

harassment and bullying are prevalent and occur much more frequently than presumed. This, however, tends to be under reported. **It has been cited that 35 to 50 percent of American employees have experienced bullying at some point in their working life** (*Lutgen and Sandvik et. al., 2007*). Bullying at sea is no exception – during the 2017/18 financial year, ISWAN received 129 cases of bullying and abuse through their Seafarerhelp confidential helpline.

### Definitions

Harassment includes any inappropriate and unwelcome conduct, which, whether intentionally or not, creates feelings of unease, humiliation, embarrassment or discomfort for the recipient.

Bullying is a particular form of harassment that includes hostile or vindictive behaviour, which can cause

the recipient to feel threatened or intimidated. Bullying has a wide range of behaviours, not limited to but including:

- Making verbal or physical threats
- Making derogatory remarks
- Ridiculing or belittling a person
- Spreading rumors
- Being over critical even about minor mistakes
- Making remarks about a person’s religion, race, colour or nationality
- Making hostile or personally intrusive telephone calls, emails or letters
- Making unreasonable demands
- Threatening another person about their job security
- Losing temper for trivial reasons
- Physically intimidating another person





- Assigning menial or demeaning tasks that are not appropriate to the job
- Using sarcasm or making jokes that hurt another person
- Cyber harassment/bullying by use of technology

**“Almost 50 percent of seafarers have experienced some form of bullying, harassment or discrimination at sea”**

Nautilus International

Over the past decade, we have seen an increased focus on the subject of harassment in the maritime sector. Campaigns to raise awareness, integrating fair practices and implementing guidelines for effectively dealing with the issue are all positive steps. However, despite these efforts, bullying continues to be a challenging issue in the profession. It happens in private, often by a person in authority with intent to induce fear to the victim. Working at

sea can make seafarers more vulnerable to harassment and bullying. This is due to the prevailing working conditions, the isolation, the tough nature of the profession and the fear of further victimisation or repercussions, if bullying is reported, since victims may be labelled as troublemakers or have their contracts terminated.

### Action

Companies and management can be the primary active agents of change by adopting a zero tolerance approach to dealing with bullying and harassment at sea. This can be implemented by:

- Establishing clear policies and procedures for dealing with harassment and bullying onboard
- Disseminating company’s policies regarding harassment to everyone onboard (in native language of crew members)
- Organising ongoing awareness programs, training sessions, campaigns, videos, conferences and other media

- Establishing channels of reporting and actions to be taken when a complaint is filed
- Ensuring privacy and confidentiality to encourage disclosure
- Establishing clear job roles, and expectations and responsibilities
- Investing in ongoing trainings
- Applying fair and transparent processes for allocating tasks, job roles, etc.
- Educating everyone for early warning signs: when a seafarer looks sad, lonely, scared, isolated, not motivated, low performance, complains of physical symptoms, avoids social interactions, etc.
- Implementing emotional intelligence programs to encourage self-awareness, social awareness and conflict resolution. Team building sessions, inspirational leadership trainings and cultural diversity working groups
- Organising activities to encourage social interactions onboard

### Conclusion

Awareness campaigns, guidelines and practices decrease incidents by establishing strict regulations against bullying. Helping people come forward and disclose incidents is also encouraged. Additional, alternative approaches that could be considered include the implementation of emotional intelligence, leadership, cultural diversity intelligence programmes that have already been applied in school or work settings with outstanding results.

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*This advice was compiled with the help of our psychological and psychometric screening partners I.M.E. Q. You can watch their mental health video library at: [www.imeq-magazine.com](http://www.imeq-magazine.com)*

*ETF/ECSCA has produced guidelines for shipping companies on identifying bullying and harassment in the workplace and to assist with developing policies to tackle the issue.*

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## CREW HEALTH PROGRAMME

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The Club was the first to launch a crew health scheme in 1996 due to increasing crew illness claims and a lack of accountability of clinics. Since 1996, the Crew Health programme has become one of the Club's leading loss prevention initiatives. The aim of the programme is to reduce the volume and value of crew illness claims which are caused by a pre-existing illnesses or disease. These underlying conditions often impact on the crew member's fitness for service and can endanger not only the health of the seafarer but also the onboard safety of other crew.

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Sophia joined Thomas Miller in 1992 and from 1994 worked as a claims handler dealing mainly with French and Spanish Members. In 2004, Sophia became the Crew Health Programme Director. Sophia has undertaken a large number of clinic audits, implemented the standard medical form and clinic guidelines. She has also lead the scheme through the largest period of growth and development with a doubling of approved clinic facilities and a four fold member increase. Sophia is a Director of Thomas Miller & Co. Ltd.

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Saidul Alom joined Crew Health from the European Region Service Team in 2004. Saidul provides administrative support to the Crew Health programme and is responsible for liaison with the approved clinics on financial billing matters and ensuring prompt payment of all clinic fees

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Stuart joined Thomas Miller in 1998 as a claims trainee for UK P&I Club's Greek Members. In April 2005 Stuart joined Crew Health as the Team Administrator. Stuart is responsible for co-ordination of Member entries and administration for the clinic approval process.