

NORTH P&I CLUB SETS OUT BENEFITS OF BETTER WEB ACCESS FOR SEAFARERS

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North P&I club says improved internet access at sea could help boost crew retention levels by offering closer links with family, friends and trainers. The advice comes in the latest issue of the 110 million GT, 'A' rated club's loss-prevention newsletter *Signals*.

'Faster turnarounds in port and restricted shore leave mean life on board can become increasingly lonely,' says North's head of loss prevention Tony Baker. 'Improving the ability to get online can have significant benefits for crew morale and wellbeing – but it needs to be managed properly.'

The club says living conditions on board and the quality and cost of communication with family are key issues of concern for people considering a seafaring career. According to Baker, 'Young seafarers now expect to have similar internet connectivity when at sea as they do at home.'

North also believes better web access will aid seafarer training, which will in turn improve crew retention and reduce accidents. 'Continual professional development programmes rely on a significant amount of on-board training and supervision, much of which could be done online,' says Baker.

However, the club points out there are a number of technical issues that need to be overcome, not least potentially prohibitive data costs – though system development and availability are continuing to make downloading cheaper.

Legal issues are also critical, potentially resulting in ship detention and crew arrest if ships' servers or personal computers are found to contain inappropriate material when calling at ports in certain jurisdictions. The club recommends shipowners include suitably worded terms in contracts of employment to ensure the benefits of internet use at sea can be enjoyed by all while maintaining the rights of individuals and employers.

North provides P&I insurance to 110 million GT of shipping entered by 375 member groups worldwide. The 'A' rated club, which is celebrating its 150th anniversary this year, is based in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, UK with regional offices in Hong Kong, Piraeus and Singapore.

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