

NORTH P&I CLUB URGES EXTRA VIGILANCE DURING BUNKER AND OIL CARGO OPERATIONS

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Ever more sophisticated oil-spill detection technology means shipowners are at even greater risk of being investigated for maritime pollution offences, according to North P&I club. The warning comes in the 20th anniversary issue of the 115 million GT, 'A' rated club's loss-prevention newsletter *Signals*.

According to North's loss prevention executive Colin Gillespie, 'As indicated by recent events in the Gulf of Mexico, the use of satellite imagery for tracking and measuring oil spills is becoming increasingly sophisticated. A less well-known use is to assist in the detection and prosecution of vessels that pollute the sea, whether accidentally or deliberately.'

The club highlights the CleanSeaNet satellite surveillance service which is used by both coastal states and the European Maritime Safety Agency to identify oil slicks. Oil spill alerts can be provided to coastal states within 30 minutes enabling them to send spotter aircraft to confirm whether there is a slick. All ships in the vicinity - or known to have passed through it - are potentially subject to investigation.

Samples of a slick can then be taken, analysed and cross-referenced against samples from suspect ships. 'If the samples match or there are no other ships in the vicinity, the evidence against the vessel is very strong and the usual outcomes - including claims, vessel arrest, fines for the owner and officers, and custodial sentences - can result,' says Gillespie.

North is thus advising its 375 member groups to take extra vigilance during all bunker and oil cargo operations - including maintaining comprehensive records - to ensure they do not become the subject of an aerial surveillance investigation or, if they do, that they can provide a full defence.

The message is being reinforced through a series of *Clean Seas* posters, which the club launched in April 2010 to help members comply with the continually changing requirements of the International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships (MARPOL). The second poster, which has just been published, focuses on the need for strict compliance with MARPOL by all officers and crew during oil transfer operations.

North, which is celebrating its 150th anniversary this year, provides P&I insurance to 90 million GT of owned tonnage and 25 million GT of chartered tonnage. It is based in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, UK with regional offices in Hong Kong, Piraeus and Singapore. An office in Tokyo is being opened later this year.

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