

IN 1500 – IMCA covid-19 update, 9 April 2020

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1. Introduction

This update collates the ongoing work of IMCA in tackling the many practical issues that have arisen as a result of lockdowns and travel restrictions. It also contains feedback from a number of Member companies and other associations on some current practices in addressing these problems.

We would encourage our membership to share their solutions with us for the betterment of our industry.

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Tags:

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2. International efforts

IMCA is actively involved with a number of key global Industry associations to develop UN-approved Recommendations to Governments and relevant national authorities ([IMO Circular Letter No.4204/Add.6](#) issued on 27 March 2020) on the facilitation of maritime trade during the COVID-19 pandemic.

These recommendations encourage Governments and national authorities to take a practical and pragmatic approach to ensure that all visiting commercial ships continue to have access to berths in port and terminals, and that quarantine restrictions are not imposed on the ship itself which prevent access to a berth. In terms of measures to facilitate crew changes in ports, it is recommended that Governments and relevant national authorities designate professional seafarers and marine personnel, regardless of nationality when in their jurisdiction, as 'key workers' providing an essential service and grant professional seafarers and marine personnel with any necessary and appropriate exemptions from national travel or movement restrictions in order to facilitate their joining or leaving ships.

On 1 April, IMO **Secretary-General Kitack Lim** appealed to the **United Nations** system agencies to [support the IMO in its request to governments to declare seafarers, port personnel, and other crucial maritime workers, as key personnel](#), highlighting the growing challenges of crew change management which is essential in supporting the global supply chain.

IMCA is working closely with the **IMO** and a number of key global Industry associations to develop UN-approved recommendations to Governments and national authorities.

IMCA is working hard with other industry groups to raise awareness and find solutions to the daily problems faced by Member companies. IMCA sits on the COVID-19 Global Industry Group which is working with the IMO and international governments. We are also part of **OEUK's Pandemic Steering Group**, and we are collaborating with **ISOA**, **IADC**, **IOGP** and **IADH** to produce specific guidance

on issues facing the offshore sector.

On 7 April, two members of the **Global Industry Group** (the ICS and ITF) published a message to **G20 Leaders and Ministers** on facilitating essential movement of seafarers and marine personnel. This letter calls for national authorities to engage immediately with their national shipowners' association, seafarers' unions and other relevant stakeholders, in order to explore solutions to the serious problem of conducting crew changes, as a matter of urgency. There is also a suggestion for a special G20 taskforce on the issue of ships' crew changes to be established to develop an effective response to the coronavirus pandemic. IMCA is ready to collaborate with any efforts in this regard, for the benefit of our Members.

3. Specific issues being faced by Members across the globe

Members have been reporting the specific challenges they are facing with regards to crew change management. Areas for consideration include:

- The challenge of working within the limits of port restrictions.
 - Repatriating stranded crew, managing extended crew rotations.
 - Working with reduced manning levels.
 - Postponement of non-essential work scopes and activities.
 - Implementing pre-travel protocols.
 - Arrangements for arrival onshore and onward travel generally but specifically of mildly symptomatic.
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4. Port restrictions

BIMCO has provided access to their port database to non-members. The database is updated daily and provides a comprehensive real time resource. The **International Group of P&I Clubs** has launched a ports dashboard which is constantly being updated by their global correspondents. The **International Association of Ports and Harbours** (IAPH) has also launched a ports information area on its website, including FAQs and a barometer on port restrictions and delays. The ITF also provides country information for seafarers on its website.

At **IMO** level, a system of regional hub ports located close to international airports is currently under consideration, as it is recognised that once crews have left a vessel they needed repatriation to their home countries, and the lack of international flights makes this a significant challenge. However, this will not necessarily be of benefit for the offshore energy sector since offshore support ships are often based in remote areas, far removed from likely hub ports. It is, therefore, essential that there is collaboration with Governments and their port authorities and that, where necessary, the recommendations issued by IMO are brought to their attention. IMCA is willing to assist Members in making any necessary approach.

5. Minimum manning levels, extended rotas or no crew changes

In several instances, Members are operating at reduced manning levels and crew rotas have been extended. This has necessitated revised risk assessments for crew remaining on-board given the risk of crew fatigue and wellbeing.

It is important to advise crew offshore and crew who may be joining in due course that a much longer stay offshore is likely and that they should prepare accordingly.

Once on-board, some members have adopted a crew segregation regime, such as:

- Separate tables in the mess.
- Different mess-time hours.
- Smaller toolbox talks (TBT).
- Crew changes extended to eight weeks where needed.

6. Pre-travel protocol

Where crew changes are taking place the following pre-travel protocol collected from various sources is considered good practice:

- Pre travel questionnaires and arrival questionnaires are being used to ascertain that personnel are asymptomatic, have been adhering to social distancing recommendations and are generally fit and well.
- Screening phone calls are also being implemented prior to departure from home and following their return home to ascertain that they remain asymptomatic.
- Personnel are being moved from their homes to the point of mobilisation and back home following demobilization by private taxi transfers. Public transport is not being used.
- Temperature checks temperature checking is in place at heliports prior to crew being mobilised and it is also being implemented offshore before crew board helicopters for their return journey.
- Given that the virus has a 14-day incubation period, a precautionary approach being implemented by some Members is the requirement for personnel to self-isolate for 14-days prior to mobilisation. This reduces the risk of someone who is infected yet asymptomatic during the 14-day incubation period, transmitting the virus on-board.
- PCR testing prior to mobilisation (detailed below).
- Implement daily temperature checks whilst on-board to assess crew are asymptomatic. When returning home, some Members are implementing a 14-day self-isolation period ashore in designated hotels or other approved accommodation prior to returning to the homes in order to reduce the risk of bringing infection into their home environment.
- To assist personnel in dealing with enforcement authorities, **Oil & Gas UK** has provided a standard template letter which members can download and issued to employees confirming their designation as 'key workers.'
- In some circumstances, Members are using vessels to transit between ports to effect crew changes when crew have not been able to fly.
- In some jurisdictions, assistance is being provided by local authorities and/or the police to facilitate movement of personnel.

7. Helicopter transfers

Concerns have been raised about the potential for Heliports to be contamination/contact points for the spread of COVID-19 during crew changes.

In the UK, a number of measures are being implemented within the Heliport and on-board the helicopter to reduce the risk.

- Measures for social distancing are being considered within the practical limits of passenger travel by helicopter. On some helicopters this requires removal of the front row of seats to give greater separation with the crew;
- Procedures are being implemented to sanitise helicopter personal protective equipment (PPE) after it has been worn to reduce the risk of possible contamination;
- Procedures are being implemented to reduce possible contamination as offshore workers transit through security. This involves maintaining social distancing, heliport workers wearing protective clothing (gloves and masks) and security staff using a wand to check passengers transiting through the heliport rather than frisking them manually;
- Helicopter crew and ground staff are now being issued with face masks and gloves to minimise any possible spread of the virus;
- Some companies are considering introducing face shields;
- The provision of screens at Check-in Desks is being introduced;
- Cockpit segregation screens between the cabin and cockpit are being considered;
- Temperature checks on inbound passengers are implemented prior to boarding as a precaution against infecting helicopter crew, fellow passengers and family members at home;
- The requirement for passengers to wear face masks is being considered by some helicopter companies.

8. Onward travel for crew demobilising

There are a number of reported problems where crews are transferred ashore but are then unable to secure onward transportation home. Also, some countries appear to be willing to accept crew entering their territory to mobilise to a ship but are not willing to permit onward travel to other countries. Again, international efforts are underway to help unlock these practical problems being faced every day.

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