

## Making headway on ship vetting

On the third day of INTERTANKO's Tanker Event in Rotterdam, it emerged that definite headway is being made on the issue of the proliferation of ship inspections. Tankers are subject to inspections from charterers, port state control authorities, P&I Clubs and class and are inspected up to 20 times a year. Owners argue that this process is both costly (all of the oil majors, bar one - ExxonMobil - charge owners for vetting inspections) and detrimental to safety.

The Oil Companies' International Marine Forum (OCIMF) introduced its Ship Inspection Reporting (SIRE) scheme in 1993 in an attempt to reduce the number of ship inspections carried out by its members. Since its inception, SIRE has "gone from strength to strength", said John Hughes, chairman of OCIMF. He pointed out that in the period from April 2001 to March 2002, 10,103 SIRE reports were submitted, while 14,866 reports were requested, meaning that there were nearly 5,000 duplicate inspections which did not take place.

The responsibility for reducing the incidences of multiple inspections does not rest with the oil companies alone, said Hughes. Currently, there are 104 organisations withdrawing SIRE reports, 14 of which are port state authorities, who withdraw only two reports out of a monthly average of 1,200. "When we talk about reducing inspections," he said, "there is an opportunity being missed here. Port state control can withdraw those reports free of charge as well, whereas even OCIMF members must pay for them."

Key to the success of SIRE is trust. According to Hughes, OCIMF has sought to restore some of the trust between the various parties in the industry through the introduction of an accreditation scheme for its inspectors. The scheme involves an intensive training course and a rigorous set of exams. The training programme is administered by an independent authority and exams are set externally. Only accredited inspectors, of which there are currently 288, are allowed to put reports into the SIRE database. A further 80 trained inspectors are waiting to undertake the final step of their training, a ship inspection carried out under the supervision of an auditor. But perhaps the most significant development to arise out of the push to reduce the number of ship inspections is the harmonisation of SIRE and the Chemical Distribution Institute's (CDI) inspection regimes. "OCIMF and CDI are closer today than they have ever been in the past," said Martin Whittle, director of CDI. "We are two industry organisations, essentially concerned with different fleets. However, we both recognise that cross-trading ships are sometimes indeed subjected to both SIRE and CDI inspections. We are both committed to working together to make these two schemes as efficient as possible."

The exact details of the harmonisation are still "confidential", but three "fairly visible" actions are in the process of being taken, said Hughes. These are the harmonisation of the Vessel Particulars Questionnaire (VPQ); the beginning of joint seminars for SIRE and CDI inspectors; and the updating of software used by both organisations in an effort to achieve a level of "sameness".

Whittle pointed out that while OCIMF and CDI are doing their utmost to help with the problem of multiple inspections, the end goal for owners has to be convincing the vetting departments of their charterers to accept a single inspection report. The issue, then, continues to be the wider one of fostering trust.