

Voyage data recorders

The revision of SOLAS Chapter V states that all passenger ships on international voyages need to carry voyage data recorders (VDR) and that other vessels upwards of 3,000 gross tonnage built after 1 July 2002 need to be fitted. IMO is still debating whether other vessels built before 1 July 2002 should fit VDR. The European Union have already made the decision that all ships entering EU ports after 1 January 2007 (greater than 20,000 gt) or 1 January 2008 (less than 20,000 gt) will have to be fitted, in the absence of an IMO decision. However, IMO are almost certain to endorse these dates during 2004.

Fitting older vessels with VDR can present some problems but manufacturers have been gaining extensive experience from retrofitting passenger vessels, including designing appropriate interface 'boxes' to many legacy systems. IMO have recently been considering the possibility of allowing the fitting of a 'simplified' VDR (S-VDR) to retrofit vessels. As well as being less expensive to purchase they will also be easier and therefore less expensive to retrofit than a full VDR.

The present draft of the S-VDR allows float free or a fixed protective data capsule. Data items to be recorded are date and time, ship's position, speed, heading, bridge audio, communications audio and radar. If it is impossible to record radar then AIS information may be substituted

Much of the information collected by the VDR is of use to owners and charterers.

This at least takes some of the sting out in having the obligation to fit VDR. The IMO NAV Sub-committee has identified some of these benefits:

- Casualty analysis of minor and potential incidents, as well as major accidents
- Liability analysis with consequent saving of litigation costs
- Voyage planning on the basis of recorded previous voyages
- Training from real life recorded situations
- Compliance monitoring by the ships' management.