



Seafarers and Port Reception Facilities: The Usual Warm Welcome!

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Abstract

Port reception facilities may be the only choice for Tankers to dispose of ship-generated oily waste. Allegations of inadequacy of such facilities have been echoing in the maritime sector for more than two decades. This paper will present the early findings of a research project focusing, in part, on seafarers' conceptions about marine pollution, their interaction with port officials, auditors, surveyors and inspectors in port. The aim is to reveal how seafarers 'frame' the inherent tensions surrounding the compliance tasks to one of the most comprehensive marine environmental regulations represented by the Marpol convention, and how such 'frames' contribute to the performance of daily compliance practices of Tanker staff at sea and in port. Further more, the study tried to investigate not only how the ship – port facility interface is supporting the effective implementation of marine environmental regulations in general, but also - and just as importantly - how it might be impeding operations and ultimately contributing to infringements to international treaties.

The study was based on qualitative semi-structured interviews with seafarers employed on Tanker ships from different countries, companies, and areas of trade. Early empirical findings of the study suggest that ports and Tanker terminals in various parts of the world have interpreted the reception facility requirement in different ways leading to confusion among stake holders (i.e. seafarers, port authorities, auditors, ship managers). While most tanker staff has shown a strong wish to have more detailed and clear and uniform guidelines, this is still not provided by port authorities in both developing and developed countries. The more 'social' findings highlight how seafarers in a truly globalised industry strongly embrace their national identities in relation to protecting the marine environment, repeatedly talking of and exhibiting their belonging to it. This embracement, however, did not seem to shade their disappointment in the occasionally not 'very warm welcome' they receive in each port call or every time they opt for using 'port reception facilities'. Finally, the paper aims to contribute to providing a better understanding of the 'human element' in relation to environmental compliance. Without such understanding we may quickly reach to a 'perceptual' ceiling in environmental performance in the maritime sector that cannot be perforated.