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ΘΕΜΑ: Vetting of Ships

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the process of vetting on ships and everything around it. Vetting inspections are crucial to a tanker ship's life because the ship cannot be chartered if it has not successfully passed a vetting inspection and thus it cannot operate and make profit.

Firstly, there is basic information regarding vetting inspections and then several topics are covered such as preparation for the vetting inspection, requirements for both the ship and the inspector. The preparation alone takes a vast amount of time due to the large amount of requirements to be met.

The process is described next along with other useful information on VIQs, most common deficiencies and the final steps of the process which are the owner's comments, the screening process and the close out meeting.

Lastly, the smart vetting working group is presented and everything you need to know about becoming a vetting inspector such as training, qualifications, guidelines and requirements.

1. Introduction

1.1 A few words about vetting inspection on ships

Vetting inspection is a grading system of a ship, enabling a potential charterer to compare between similar ships and choose the best for his needs, to maximize efficiency.

To operate efficiently and minimize liability, charterers and all industry players must take all reasonable steps to ensure ships are being properly operated and are in a suitable condition to complete a voyage safely.

The risks from using substandard ships include:

- casualties - minor delays through to total loss, which carry severe human, environmental and commercial costs
- undue delays and costs while the ship is inspected in port
- falling foul of regulators
- rising insurance costs

Ship vetting involves sourcing data on ships and evaluating the potential risks such as the ship's structural integrity, competence of owners, managers and crew, past casualties and incidents.

At first, oil companies owned the oil carriers, which reduced the long time charters. In fact of that; the charter market became active. Around 70's to 80's the tanker ownership moved to independent owners, although the new fleet was small and inexperienced. The oil industry as the major spot charterer, influenced by the ship managers, started to be concerned of quality tankers. Based on international conventions such as SOLAS, MARPOL and STCW, they created a large database containing important details for each available vessel.

The main purpose was to increase safety and decrease the environmental pollution. It started becoming real by checking if the ship complies with the international legislation, avoiding oil pollution, making the safety management better, decrease the danger of explosion from the terminals and finally by ensuring that cargo would not be carried by substandard ships. Nowadays, when choosing a ship, a charterer searches ship's and company's history and profile and their involvement in any accident, if there was any. If two ships have the same price, the charterer will choose the one with the less deficiency.

The master, whenever an inspection is announced to be carried out on the vessel, should prepare the ship according VIQ (Vessel's Inspection Questionnaire). He has to show to the Inspector ship's condition and crew's certificates, also cargo papers and vessel's records. Preparation of deck machinery and antipollution gear for the deck and engine machinery, as well as log books and records from the engine department have to be checked several times because these are the typical deficiencies.

Many practical issues occurred within the industry: Tanker owners and managing companies complained about the image-problems that vetting caused at a company's reputation, most oil companies and politicians did not trust them as a result for more vetting, but these results was showed that were not the best way for ensuring a ship's

quality and its ability of carrying the cargo. After all, oil companies continued to distrust shipping companies and the problem got worse.

Finally it was revealed that there were other available data containing information about shipping companies; including casualty records, costs, processes and surveys. The shipping companies came to the conclusion that if these data were better-shared, everybody would know the condition of the ships and the worthiness of the companies, so that the complied ships would not anymore be examined continuously from vetting inspectors. Also crew's effectiveness would be increased and the safety of a ship would be much improved.

2. Preparing for the vetting inspection

The onboard inspection can only be successful if the tanker is prepared for the inspection. The inspector who is to carry out the inspection will start to collect impressions from even before the time he takes his first step onto the gangway and will continue to do so until he takes the last step off the gangway when leaving the tanker after completing the inspection.

Almost all inspectors are former seafarers who from both deck and engine room experience are able to assess a tanker. Most likely the first impression formed from the time the tanker is sighted until the inspector's arrival at the Master's cabin will be the strongest, although it will be subjective at this point. The inspectors will undertake the inspection of the tanker looking for objective criteria by which to judge the tanker. It is a fact of life that, however subconscious the urge may be, the inspector will look for objective evidence to support his initial subjective opinion. Thus the importance of the route from ship side to Master's cabin should not be underestimated. Remember you do not get a second chance to make a first impression.

Make sure that the inspection is scheduled at a convenient time for the vessel, so it does not conflict with other inspections or similar matters. This could easily be arranged through the port agent.

Make sure that each head of department has completed their own inspection before arrival at port and that any deficiencies have been reported / corrected. This should be incorporated into the normal routine guidelines.

An effective way of administering this is to introduce a Self-Assessment form covering the relevant areas.

The next layer in this table is the delegation given to petty officers and in turn, to the rest of the crew, this will achieve an understanding all the way down through the ranks. Prior to the inspection preparations can be made in certain areas.

2.1 Tanker management self-assessment (TMSA)

The most common reason for rejecting vessels is perceived management and compliance weaknesses within a company, NOT vessel-specific equipment “deficiencies”. Many ship owners have asked – what do the Charterers want? The OCIMF Tanker Management and Self-Assessment Program (TMSA) was partly created to address this question and to lead to continued improvement in the tanker industry.

TMSA 2 provides an update that builds on operators experience with TMSA and feedback from the industry

TMSA (1 & 2) was designed to:

- Complement the ISM system by encouraging self-regulation and continuous self-improvement
- Enable ship operators to demonstrate their strong commitment to safety and environmental excellence

Many TMSA processes and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) are already being in use by better Operators within their existing SMS. TMSA is intended as a tool for improving an SMS, NOT a replacement for the SMS.

A recent addition to the risk assessment tools used by major oil companies is composed of a set of key performance indicators against which a tanker management company must self-assess their compliance and submit the results to the major oil companies for their evaluation. The tanker management company is expected to develop a comprehensive plan for full compliance with both the key performance indicators and the best practices identified in the TMSA Program. Major oil companies will then use the submitted results as a baseline when performing management audits to determine if the tanker management company is in fact operating in accordance with expectations.

Based upon commercial needs, there are three levels of assessment used by the major oil companies: (1) terminal use, which will clear a vessel to call at one of the major oil company's terminals; (2) voyage charter, which will clear the vessel for a single voyage; and (3) term charter, which will clear the vessel for use for an extended period of time. The depth, complexity and difficulty of each of these levels of assessment vary.

While for the terminal use and voyage charter relationships a ship inspection and the operator's TMSA will be sufficient for the major oil company's assessment, a term charter relationship might also require a thorough office audit. The major oil company will then review SIRE reports and TMSA submissions, as well as the vessel's status with the U.S. Coast Guard and the American Bureau of Shipping. OSG and OSGM have undergone and successfully completed numerous audits by major international oil companies in the past and we are well positioned to be a carrier of choice in the Jones Act trade.

3. Mandatory inspection requirements

The following mandatory inspection requirements must be followed by inspectors in the conduct of their shipboard inspection in order for reports to meet the requirements of the SIRE Program:

3.1 General requirements

The inspector must meet the following requirements:

- The inspector must introduce himself or herself to the Master or the Master's authorized deputy, explain the scope of the inspection and discuss the preferred order in which it will be carried out, prior to commencement of the inspection. Inspectors should co-operate fully to conduct the inspection in the order that will cause the least disruption to the vessel's operations. The inspector must be accompanied by a member of the ship's staff at all times during the course of the inspection.
- The inspector must set a good example with respect to his or her own personal safety procedures whilst on board the vessel and in the terminal and must wear appropriate personal protection equipment at all times.
- Electrical or electronic equipment of non-approved type, whether mains or battery powered, must not be active, switched on or used within any gas-hazardous or other hazardous areas. This includes torches, radios, mobile telephones, radio pagers, calculators, computers, photographic equipment and any other portable equipment that is electrically powered but not approved for operation in a gas-hazardous area. It should be borne in mind that equipment such as mobile telephones and radio pagers, if switched on, can be activated remotely and a hazard can be generated by the alerting or calling mechanism and, in the case of mobile telephones, by the natural response to answer the call. Any specific Terminal requirements must be adhered to.
- Any Observations that the inspector intends to record in the VIQ must be pointed out and discussed 'on site' at the time with the member of the ship's staff assigned to accompany the inspector. This ensures that the nature of the observations is fully understood and can also avoid extended discussion at the end of the inspection.
- On completion of the inspection, some Submitting Companies require the inspector to provide a list of the inspection findings in the form of written observations, others do not. In either case, the inspector must discuss the inspection findings with the Master or the Master's authorized deputy before leaving the vessel. Other than to prepare these observations, however, the inspector must not remain on the vessel to complete the inspection report. It is recognized that on occasions this may not be possible, especially when leaving and joining the vessel is done by helicopter on vessels doing STS operations.
- The guide time for an inspection is 8-10 hours and as a guide the documentation checks should not exceed 3 hours, and this time should be used to conduct the inspection of the vessel, compile the observation list if appropriate, and conduct the close out meeting. The completion of the report using the report editor software before the inspector leaves the vessel must not occur as this reduces the time that the inspector will spend conducting the physical inspection of the vessel. The inspector must leave the vessel on

completion of the inspection and must not remain on board to complete entering the report details into the report editor.

- The guide time is 8-10 hours however the actual time to conduct the inspection will be greater than this taking in account travel time to and from the vessel. All inspectors should take into account their own rest hours and fatigue levels when conducting inspections. ‘Back to back’ inspections are discouraged and inspectors should complete the report for one vessel before commencing an inspection on another vessel.

3.2 Additional requirements

Additional requirements for the inspector to follow:

- Must respond by entering the requested information or by checking one response box for each question;
- Must, where guidance to a question is provided, consider all the guidance to determine how the question should be answered;
- Must carefully consider and provide a proper response to every question;
- Must use objective evidence when answering each question (the assurance of the vessel’s staff is insufficient evidence or proof);
- Must include an explanatory Observation in the Observation section that accompanies a question when it is answered “No” or “Not Seen”. Where the VIQ question is answered “Not Applicable” or in cases where the guidance requires a comment regardless of how a question is answered, such comment must be recorded in the “Comments” section.
- Must not use a “Yes” response to any question where an inspector’s Observation or Other comment contains negative elements (if there is such negative Observation or Other comment then the answer to that question should be “No”);
- Must not, in any Other Comment or Additional Comments, include
 - i. Any overall or partial ship rating or indication of ship acceptability / non-acceptability;
 - ii. Any matter unrelated to the topic of a VIQ chapter and, in particular, any matter unrelated to ship safety and pollution prevention; and,
 - iii. Any overall chapter ending or other partial summary of the inspector’s findings;
- Must give the factual basis and specific reasons for any opinions or subjective comments made by the inspector;
- Must note any deficiencies or inspector-observed conditions, to which action was taken whilst the inspector was on board, and
- Must not offer any comments or opinions with regard to actions to be taken in respect of any deficiencies or observed conditions noted by the inspector.
- Must not use the expression “we” in any Observation or Other comment unless the inspection was conducted by more than one inspector.
- Must not at any time give any verbal indication of ship acceptability / non-acceptability.
- Must not discuss or communicate by any means (verbal, written, electronic or otherwise) any findings, information gained or outcome of the inspection with any third party other than those with a legitimate involvement in the inspection process for that vessel.

Inspectors may:

- Include in the “Comments” section accompanying any question, inspector comments even where the question is answered with a “Yes” provided such comments give useful information to the report recipient;
- Respond to questions or provide comments on the basis of material not included in the guidance specified for the question but must note this reliance and explain reason for the reliance;
- Include in the “Additional Comments” for each chapter, any comments in respect of the subject matter not addressed by questions contained in the chapter additional to those that the inspector may make in response to the specific questions in the chapter; and
- Respond to questions which are not applicable to either the vessel or its cargo by checking such questions “Not Applicable”.

3.3 Other Inspection requirements

Some other requirements for the inspector to follow:

- Unless authorized by the OCIMF Inspecting Member and agreed by the vessel’s operator, inspections should not take place at night.
- The inspector should consider requesting that equipment be run and tested to confirm that it is in operational order and that officers and crew are familiar with its operation, but must ensure that such requests do not cause delay or interfere with the safety and normal operation of the vessel.
- It should be recognized that the overall objective of the inspection is to provide the user of a SIRE Report with a factual record of the vessel’s condition and standard of operation at the time of the inspection and, in turn, allow an assessment of the risk that use of the vessel might pose.
- The scope of a SIRE inspection is expected to enable an inspection to be accomplished within an 8- 10 hour period. Inspectors must take into account the hours of rest requirements that must be observed and ensure that the SIRE inspection does not interfere with these.
- Under normal circumstances, a SIRE inspection will take place when a vessel is alongside in port whilst discharging or loading cargo. During the course of the inspection ballast/void tank entry is discouraged. Physical assessment of the condition of ballast tanks/void spaces etc. can be made only in circumstances where the tank access hatches or plates can be removed and the tank internals sighted from the deck. In any event, actual tank access should only be made at the specific instructions of the inspecting company, with the authority of the Master and provided that port and terminal regulations allow. In all cases, the enclosed space entry procedures set out in ISGOTT Chapter 10 must be strictly observed.

4. The inspection process

The Vetting Inspection is simply an inspection i.e. a “snap shot in time”.

For vetting purposes a vessel does not pass or fail an inspection, but the inspection forms part of the overall screening process.

4.1 The inspection

Be prepared to demonstrate the proper operation of the following systems/alarms:

- Inert Gas system alarms
- Oily water separator
- Firefighting systems
- Steering gear
- Emergency generator
- Engine room ventilation shutdowns
- Fuel oil cut-off valve

In addition, the following items may be checked and should be ready:

- Firemen's outfits
- International shore connection
- Navigation equipment
- Charts, publications, and corrections
- EPIRB, pyrotechnics and hydrostatic releases
- Flame screens, bunker tanks
- Suitable paint locker
- Marine sanitation device

Reference should also be made to the particular requirements of the oil major inspecting the vessel. The following items are of vital importance as these provide an overall impression of the vessel, and will play an essential part in how the inspection will be conducted.

- Gangway: Correctly arranged - is the gangway net rigged? Is there a life ring nearby?
- Signs: All warning signs posted
- Crew: All crew working on deck should have hard hats and the necessary protection gear.
- Deck Watch: Is he present in the area? Hard hat, emergency equipment handy, necessary for cargo loading / discharging; walkie-talkie; ask the inspector who he is and who he wants to see; confirm with Duty Officer that this is OK. One crew member should follow the inspector to the ship office
- Fire Equipment at the Manifold: Correctly rigged and present
- Deck: Clean, free of oil / water and obstructions
- Scuppers: Blocked, emergency pump in position and discharge connected
- Cargo Information: Make sure that all personnel involved in the cargo operation are briefed regarding what cargoes are being loaded / discharged, particularly the deck watch. All MSDS to be up and easily readable
- Emergency Equipment: Working, present and clearly marked
- Moorings: In good order, no lines on the winch ends

- Accommodation: All doors closed, clean, and in proper order

The inspector may need to have a copy of the following:

- Classification Document
- Certificate of Registry
- Cargo Ship Safety Construction Certificate
- Cargo Ship Safety Equipment Certificate
- Safety Radiotelegraphy Certificate
- Load Line Certificate
- IMO Certificate of Fitness
- IOPP Certificate & Supplement
- Certificate of Financial Responsibility
- A Crew List
- A Drawing of the vessel's cargo tank arrangement
- Vessel's Safe Manning Document

The following should be available for Inspection (some are not applicable to all vessels):

Masters should lay out the certificates in the same order as they appear in the VPQ/VIQ. This saves time and creates a good impression of ordered preparation.

- Officer's Licenses
- Health Certificates
- P&A Manual
- Approved COW Manual
- Approved Ballast Manual
- Oil / Cargo record book
- Oil transfer procedures
- Garbage log for compliance with MARPOL Annex V
- Proof of cargo hose / piping testing
- Proof of fixed and portable firefighting equipment servicing
- Proof of professional servicing of breathing apparatus
- Proof of life raft servicing
- Settings for vessel's PV valves
- Shipping document and cargo manifest
- Certificate of inhabitation or stabilization of cargo
- Declaration of Inspection if transferring bunkers
- Cargo Information Cards for the cargo on board
- Inert Gas Manual
- Waiver Letters, if any
- Vessel Response Plan
- Safety Manual
- Vessel Operation Manual
- Company's policy for upgrading and training.

You do not pass or fail a vetting inspection!

However you can be well prepared, make sure that the inspector is accompanied on the vessel during the inspection. The best people to do this would be the Master, Chief Engineer, Chief Officer and the First Assistant Engineer (Second Engineer), who can divide the areas of inspection amongst themselves.

Normally, the inspector will start by checking all certificates and documentation with the Master. He will then move into the areas listed opposite. However, it must be remembered that the order and schedule of the inspection can be changed to achieve less disturbance to the normal operations onboard. The inspector will have a pre-planned inspection format, which he will wish to follow, though there is nothing to stop different sections being done in a different order. With the new OCIMF VPQ, much of the data referring to the tanker will have been completed in advance. Make sure that you have a completed up-to-date copy available for the inspector as this will save much time.

Vetting Inspections may be undertaken by:

- Individual oil/chemical companies or terminals
- Accredited SIRE inspectors under the SIRE system
- Accredited CDI inspectors under the CDI system

4.2 Major oil companies vetting process

Shipping, especially the carriage of crude oil and refined petroleum product carriers and barges operating in the Jones Act trade, has been, and will remain heavily regulated by the federal government, the IMO and classification societies such as the American Bureau of Shipping. Furthermore, concerns for the environment and public image have led the major oil companies to develop and implement a strict due diligence process when selecting their commercial shipping partners to ensure risk exposure is managed using pre-defined acceptance criteria. The vetting process has therefore evolved into a sophisticated and comprehensive assessment of both the vessel and the vessel operator.

While numerous factors are considered and evaluated prior to a commercial decision, major oil companies through their association, Oil Companies International Marine Forum (“OCIMF”), have developed and implemented two basic tools: a Ship Inspection Report Program (“SIRE”) and the Tanker Management Self-Assessment (“TMSA”) Program.

The SIRE ship inspection process is based upon a thorough vessel inspection performed by accredited OCIMF inspectors, resulting in a report being generated and available for viewing by all OCIMF members. The report is an important element of the ship evaluation undertaken by any major oil company when a commercial need exists.

4.2.1 What is OCIMF?

The mission of OCIMF (Oil Companies International Marine Forum) is to be the foremost authority to ensure safe and environmentally responsible operation of Oil Tankers, Terminals and Offshore Support Vessels, promoting continuous improvement in standards of design and operation.

4.3 What is SIRE?

The SIRE Program was introduced in 1993 to provide to OCIMF Members and others who shared OCIMF’s concerns for pollution prevention and Tanker safety, information that related to the condition and operational practices that were observed during the course of ship inspections. Since then, SIRE has grown to become a key tool used by Oil Companies, Charterers and others to establish vessel quality and operational standards. Since the program commenced, more than 150,000 inspection

reports have been submitted. Each month, Report Recipients access more than 3,000 reports from SIRE.

In addition to the inspections that are conducted by Inspectors who are accredited by OCIMF, since 1997 Tanker Operators have been able to submit information pertaining to the physical information about the vessel (Length, beam, etc.) using OCIMF supplied “Vessel Particulars Questionnaire” computer software.

In 2002, OCIMF was requested to expand the scope of SIRE by developing an inspection regime for barges, vessels associated with the towing and pushing of barges, and vessels utilized for the carriage of gas and hydrocarbon products by road tankers and in packaged cargoes.

SIRE stands for Ship Inspection Report Program, which was introduced by the OCIMF (Oil Companies International Marine Forum) in 1993 as a safety initiative to address concerns about sub-standard shipping. The SIRE Program is a unique Tanker Risk Assessment tool which is of great value to Charterers, Ship Operators, Terminal Operators and Government bodies concerned with ship safety. It consists of a large pool of up-to-date information about Tankers and Barges.

The SIRE system is a very large database of up-to-date information about tankers and barges. Essentially, SIRE has focused tanker industry awareness on the importance of meeting satisfactory tanker quality and ship safety standards. Since its introduction, the SIRE Program has received industry-wide acceptance and participation by both OCIMF Members, Program recipients and by ship Operators. The expansion of Barges and small vessels into SIRE was inaugurated in late 2004.

How does it work? OCIMF member companies commission vessel inspections and appoint an accredited SIRE inspector to conduct an inspection. The inspector accesses the vessel particulars from the SIRE database along with the appropriate Vessel or Barge Inspection Questionnaires (VIQ/BIQ) before carrying out an on-board inspection of activities ranging from cargo handling processes to the vessel’s pollution prevention measures. The resultant report contributes to the member company’s risk assessment in advance of charter. The report is also uploaded to the SIRE database, where, for a nominal fee, it can be accessed by registered companies who charter tankers or operate terminals. Free access to all SIRE reports is provided to government agencies engaged in port state control activities. Benefits of SIRE by establishing a standardized, objective inspection process that systematically examines tanker operations and that is shared by OCIMF members and other authorized recipient, SIRE has been instrumental in driving up expectations and behaviors relating to operational and safety standards in the industry.

In addition, since its launch, SIRE has contributed to:

- Improved operational standards and a reduced number of incidents.
- The establishment of uniform standards and training for ship inspectors.
- A reduction in the number of repeat inspections on the same vessel, thereby reducing the burden on the vessel’s crew.

Since its introduction, more than 180,000 inspection reports have been submitted to SIRE. Currently there are over 22,500 reports on over 8000 vessels for inspections that have been conducted in the last 12 months. On average Program Recipients access the SIRE database at a rate of more than 8000 reports per month.

The SIRE program requires a uniform inspection protocol that is predicated by the following:

- Vessel Inspection Questionnaire (VIQ)
- Barges Inspection Questionnaire (BIQ)
- Uniform SIRE Inspection Report
- Vessels Particulars Questionnaire (VPQ)
- Barge Particulars Questionnaire (BPQ)

These features have been established to make the program more uniform and user friendly and to provide a level of transparency unique in the marine transportation industry.

SIRE has established itself as a major source of technical and operational information to prospective charterers and other program users. Its increasing use corresponds with oil industry efforts to better ascertain whether vessels are well managed and maintained. OCIMF is in no doubt that better informed vetting decisions are leading to improvements in the quality of ships, accelerating its continuing drive for safer ships and cleaner seas.

Inspection reports are maintained on the index for a period of 12 months from the date of receipt and are maintained on the database for 2 years. SIRE access is available, at a nominal cost, to OCIMF members, bulk oil terminal operators, port authorities, canal authorities, oil, power, industrial or oil trader companies which charter tankers/barges as a normal part of their business. It is also available, free of charge, to Governmental bodies which supervise safety and/or pollution prevention in respect of oil tankers/barges (e.g. port state control authorities, MOUs, etc.). Applicants wishing to participate in the SIRE Program are required to obtain formal applications and are asked to submit their request via email or fax. Please include your full style mailing address.

4.4 Chemical distribution institute (CDI)

CDI-M (Marine) was created by the chemical industry to improve the safety and quality performance of bulk liquid shipping. DI-M now provides annual inspection reports on the world fleet of chemical and liquid petroleum gas tankers, over 600 ship owners with 3000 ships participate in the scheme. The inspections are conducted by over 70 CDI-M Accredited inspectors located in ports around the world.

The CDI is a chemical industry organization, incorporated under the law of the Netherlands as the Stitching Chemical Distribution Institute (CDI) and operates as a non-profit making foundation.

CDI is managed by a Board of Directors consisting of seven individuals nominated by the participating chemical companies. The Board of Directors establishes policy and is responsible for overall affairs of the foundation. Individual Executive Boards are elected to oversee and direct the staff managing day to day activities for the Marine, Terminals and Marine Packed Cargo Schemes.

4.4.1 CDI Objectives:

- To constantly improve the safety, security and quality performance of marine transportation and storage for the chemical industry.

- Through cooperation with industry and centers of education, drive the development of industry best practice in marine transportation and storage of chemical products.
- To provide information and advice on industry best practice and international legislation for marine transportation and storage of chemical products to customers and stakeholders.
- To monitor current and future international legislation and provide experience, knowledge and advice from the chemical industry to the legislators.
- To provide chemical companies with cost effective systems for risk assessment, thus assisting their commitment to Responsible Care and the Code of Distribution Management Practice.
- To provide a single set of reliable and consistent inspection data which chemical companies can use with confidence.
- To provide the chemical industry with an independent organization for:
 1. Training, qualification and accreditation of inspectors.
 2. Development and maintenance of databases on which inspection and risk assessment information can be promulgated.

5. Vessel inspection questionnaires (VIQs)

5.1 Using the SIRE vessel inspection questionnaires (VIQs)

The inspection questionnaires used in this program contain a series of questions related to safety and pollution prevention applicable to the type of vessel that is inspected. These questions are consecutively numbered and are logically grouped into separate chapters. Each chapter contains a series of questions to be answered by the inspector. Questions may be accompanied by guidance, namely:

- Guidance notes to inspectors,
- Reference source(s) citing regulation(s) or industry guidelines pertaining to questions; and
- An indicator to identify issues when an inspector comment is mandatory.

The above-mentioned guidance, regulatory/industry references amplify the questions and these are provided to assist the inspector to answer the questions.

Box	Option	Response
Y	Yes	Tick “Yes” if, in the inspector’s professional judgment assisted by the guidance (if provided), a positive response can be made to the question. If, in the inspector’s judgment the Yes response requires to be amplified with further positive comments, the inspector may record such comments in the Comments box. Inspectors should keep in mind, that unless an unusual situation needs to be positively described, then a “Yes” response without comment is adequate.
N	No	Tick “No” if, in the inspector’s professional judgment assisted by the guidance (if provided), a negative response should be made to the question.
NS	Not Seen	Tick “Not Seen” if the issue addressed by a question has not been seen or checked by the inspector. The reason why the topic or issue was not seen must be recorded in the Observations box.
NA	Not Applicable	Tick “Not Applicable” if the subject matter covered by the question is not applicable to the vessel being inspected. In some cases, the “Not Applicable” response is made automatically within the software and is subject to the type of vessel being inspected. In other cases, a “Not Applicable” response is not provided to the question and only the “Yes”, “No” or “Not Seen” response options are available. If, in the inspector’s judgment the “Not Applicable” response requires to be amplified with further comments, the inspector may record such comments in the Comments box. If, in the inspector’s judgment an explanatory comment is necessary, the inspector may make such comment in the “Comments” section accompanying the question provided such comment makes amplification to assist the understanding of a report recipient as to an issue associated with a specific question.
	Observations and Comments	An Observation by the inspector is required for a “No” or “Not Seen” response. Where the question specifically calls for inspector comment irrespective of how the response box is checked, such comments are required to be recorded in the “Comments” section that accompanies the question. Inspectors are free to record comments even where a box is checked “Yes” provided such comment makes amplification to assist the understanding of a report recipient as to an issue associated with a specific

		question.
	Additional Comments	The Additional Comments section at the end of each chapter may be used to record comments in respect of the chapter that are additional to those which the inspector may make when responding to the specific questions.

5.2 VIQs Chapters

VIQs contain 13 chapters which are:

- Chapter 1** General Information
- Chapter 2** Certification and Documentation
- Chapter 3** Crew Management
- Chapter 4** Navigation
- Chapter 5** Safety Management
- Chapter 6** Pollution Prevention
- Chapter 7** Structural Condition
- Chapter 8** Cargo and Ballast Systems - Petroleum
- Chapter 8** Cargo and Ballast Systems - Chemicals
- Chapter 8** Cargo and Ballast Systems - LPG
- Chapter 8** Cargo and Ballast Systems LNG
- Chapter 9** Mooring
- Chapter 10** Communications
- Chapter 11** Engine and Steering Compartments
- Chapter 12** General Appearance and Condition
- Chapter 13** Ice Operations

Example of VIQ content:

Crude Oil Washing

If the vessel is not fitted with a crude oil washing system questions 8.50 to 8.60 need not be answered, however if the vessel has a crude oil washing system but is not in use at the time of inspection then question 8.50 to 8.60 should still be answered.

8.50 Is the vessel fitted with a crude oil washing system?

Every new crude oil tanker of 20,000 tons deadweight and above shall be fitted with a cargo tank cleaning system using crude oil washing.

8.51 If crude oil washing is being carried out are the tanks being Crude oil washed in accordance with IMO requirements?

With respect to the ballasting of cargo tanks, sufficient cargo tanks shall be crude oil washed prior to each ballast voyage in order that, taking into account the tanker's trading pattern and expected weather conditions, ballast water is put only into cargo tanks which have been crude oil washed. (MARPOL Annex 1 35.2) Before departure on a ballast voyage: • ballast water is put only into cargo tanks which have been crude oil washed. Approximately one quarter of the cargo tanks shall be crude oil washed for sludge control purposes on a rotational basis in accordance with the procedures specified in the Operations and Equipment Manual. However, for these purposes, no tank need be crude oil washed more than once in every four months; • If it is considered that additional ballast in a cargo tanks or tanks may be required during the ballast voyage, the tank or tanks which may be used for this ballast shall be crude oil washed in accordance with the procedures in the Operations and Equipment Manual; and • Ballast water shall not be put into cargo tanks that have not been crude oil washed. (IMO Res. 446(XI) 6.1 and amendments A.496(XII) and A.897(21) Note: If the crude oil being carried is listed in the Crude Oil Washing Operations and

Equipment Manual as being not suitable for crude oil washing then answer the question N/A.

8.52 Is an approved Crude Oil Washing Operations and Equipment Manual provided?

8.53 If the vessel is crude oil washing, has a crude oil washing plan and checklist been completed and is it being followed?

8.54 Is the person in charge of COW operations suitably qualified?

Where a person such as the Master, the chief officer or the cargo control officer assumes overall charge of a crude oil wash he shall: (a) Have at least one year's experience on oil tankers where his duties have included the discharge of cargo and associated crude washing. Where his duties have not included crude oil washing operations, he shall have completed a training program in crude oil washing in accordance with IMO Resolution A.446 (XI); (b) Have participated at least twice in crude oil wash programs one of which shall be on the particular ship for which he is required to undertake the responsibility of cargo discharge. Alternatively, this latter participation may be acceptable if undertaken on a ship that is similar in all relevant respects; and (c) Be fully knowledgeable of the contents of the Operations and Equipment Manual.

8.55 Do records indicate that the crude oil washing system was pressure tested prior to use?

Before arriving in a port where it is intended to crude oil wash, the tank washing system should be pressure tested to normal working pressure and examined for leaks. The system should be drained down after testing to avoid the risk of leaks due to thermal expansion. Any leaks found should be made good, after which the system should be re-tested and proved leak free. During crude oil washing, the system must be kept under constant observation so that any leak can be detected immediately and action taken to deal with it. When tanks for crude oil washing are being changed over, the pressure in the COW line should be reduced to a minimum before any valves on the system are opened or closed, thereby minimizing the potential for damage due to surge pressure.

8.56 Do records indicate that oxygen readings of the tanks to be crude oil washed have been checked by portable meter and found to be within maximum permissible limits?

8.57 Are crude oil washing line pressure gauges working?

8.58 Is the tank cleaning heater, where fitted, effectively isolated from the crude oil washing line?

8.59 Are any hydrant-type connections on the crude oil washing lines securely sealed?

Note: Either blanks or valves with caps should be fitted.

8.60 Are records maintained of previous COW operations?

Note: A record should be being maintained of all COW operations, including the tanks washed, the number of machines used, the time washing started and was completed, the washing pattern employed, the washing line pressure and the method employed to ensure that the tanks were dry

6. Most common deficiencies

6.1 Bridge and radio room

- Passage plan only pilot to pilot. Ensure that the filed passage plan covers berth to berth navigation
- Missing publications or old editions onboard when new publications have been issued
- Missing Master's standing orders and night order book
- No logs for gyro error
- No entry of position on the navigation chart during transit of pilotage to berth
- Chart corrections not logged correctly

6.2 Cargo control room and tank deck

- No cargo / ballast plan available
- Hydraulic leaks on deck
- Officers and ratings not wearing hard hats on deck
- No screens inside the vents for the ballast tanks
- No calibration gas for gas detection instruments
- Crew not wearing personal protection gear
- No policy for entering tanks

6.3 Engine room and steering gear

- No procedures or instructions posted for foam system
- Emergency steering procedures not posted properly in steering gear room
- Hot work procedures not used or not present in the manuals
- No safety guidelines available for engine room / workshop welding equipment
- No eye protection warning notices posted for engine workshop machinery
- No clean goggles by grinders and lathes

6.4 Accommodation / galley

- Untidy
- Overhead ventilation greasy - fire hazard
- Accommodation ventilators with no identification labels

6.5 ISPS code

It is worth mentioning the ISPS/MTSA code in this context, as it is important to be aware that whilst certain parts of the ships "may" for whatever reason be secured areas this should not stop the vetting inspector from been given access to these areas but the inspector should be accompanied by a member of the ships staff.

6.6 Example of observations – corrective/preventive actions

VETTING OBSERVATIONS BY SHELL

Observation 4.20

It was observed that a dangerous wreck and charted shoal near the planned course line at the approach of the Scheld Estuary had not been marked as no go area.

Root Cause: Incomplete entries by individual

Corrective Action/Preventive Action: As per Company's Training Policy training of seafarers is done both ashore in the Training Centers and on board the vessels. Master was instructed and has confirmed that additional training was given to all on board

Deck Officers. Furthermore 2nd Officer will be closely monitored by Master and then to attend a refresher course during his vacation. In order to avoid reoccurrence copy of this message was sent to Company's vessels and the Training Centers in Manila and Poland for their guidance and future reference. Marine Superintendent on his next visit to the vessel will check and confirm Compliance of the Navigating Procedures.

Observation 4.22

It was observed that parallel indexing information was not available on the charts during passage Dover Strait and approach Scheld Estuary and on the river approaches.

Root Cause: incomplete entries by individual

Corrective Action/Preventive Action: During a safety meeting on board Master instructed the on watch Officers to comply with the good Navigational practices and demands, follow Company's Procedures for the safe navigation of the ship, closely to monitor ship's position, markings on the charts, steering courses, No go areas, Parallel indexing, margins of safety, distance off danger, charts and course changes, etc. Furthermore 2nd Officer will be closely monitored by Master and then to attend a refresher course during his vacation. In order to avoid re-occurrence copy of this message was sent to Company's vessels and the Training Centers in Manila and Poland for their guidance and future reference. Marine Superintendent on his next visit to the vessel will check and confirm Compliance of the Navigating Procedures.

7. Owner's comments

When the vetting inspector leaves the gangway, the vessel inspection is finished; however, it's now that the screening process begins and the owners reply to any comments deficiencies raised play a very large part in this screening process.

What the charterer is looking for are quality replies to the comments raised that indicate the comments are taken seriously by the owner - these replies will be used as a measure of the owners quality management. This process is going to be measured by the vetting manager's subjective assessment of the quality of the owner's replies to comments about his ship's latest inspection.

Many, otherwise acceptable vessels do not pass this part of the vetting process because the owner's replies to the vetting inspection do not provide "closure" of the indicated conditions and this results in the "approval" either been delayed or denied.

It is important that the owner sends replies that show, acceptance and respect for the system, that the owner has an active Safety Management System in place that takes every deficiency seriously. The owners reply should be able to identify the "root cause" of the deficiency and actually addresses the real cause of the deficiency. It should make the necessary changes to existing operation procedures that are necessary to reduce the chance of the deficiency occurring again.

Some examples of replies that do "not" do this are, "The deficiency has been rectified", "the deficiency will be rectified at the earliest opportunity", "we have instructed the Master to not do it again", "The spare parts have been ordered.

To indicate that you have an effective system in place it is necessary to take care of the deficiency within the ISM system, for example identify and the non-conformity within the ISM system, establish the root cause, and establish effective corrective action, this should then be implemented and the necessary changes to existing procedures made. The deficiency then becomes effectively closed out.

It is not sufficient to say the deficiency is fixed; you need to explain that the problem that caused the deficiency is also fixed.

8. The screening process

Having been through all the items mentioned so far this is still not the end of the process. In addition to the vetting inspection, submitting shining examples of Owners comments. The charterer will also assess and review many other aspects of your operation as well, such as other vessels in your fleet, the vessels incident history, feedback from the charterers terminals, the quality of the owner, detention history, any previous problems with clearance of the vessel, inspection history of the vessel, the age of the vessel, crew quality, the management system in place, general industry information, any conditions of class, CAP rating, fatigue analysis (if appropriate), The vessels flag, Classification society, PSC Black Listing, etc.

Individual vetting departments may differ in how recent they require an inspection to be in order to rely upon the inspection report. However, it is understood that every vetting department will be willing to rely upon an inspection report if the inspection took place less than six months previously. It is the policy of some vetting departments to access all of the available SIRE reports when evaluating a vessel that has been nominated for their business.

8.1 What is the screening process?

- Process used by oil & chemical companies to assess acceptability of 3rd party vessels to carry their cargoes and/or call at their terminals.
- Inspections, both SIRE and CDI, provide information on operation of vessel and effectiveness of operator's management system as input to vetting assessment.
- They are NOT the vetting review
- It is necessary to understand that the actual vetting inspection is only a part of the screening process, and the completed VIQ does not contain any overall verdict as to the acceptability or otherwise of a vessel.
- The results of the VIQ along with Owners Comments are used to assist with the actual screening decisions which is made separately by each oil/chemical company or other charterer, but the vetting inspection report is only a part of the overall screening process
- Each of the oil companies, terminals, Port State Control, that utilizes the risk management tool of vetting has its own policies and systems that suit its individual needs. The SIRE or CDI inspection is part of the process of each vetting group, as many other aspects and considerations are taken into account before the final evaluation and decision is made to accept a vessel for its nominated use.
- The screening process begins with the operator of a vessel completing a Harmonized Vessel Particulars Questionnaire ("HVPQ"). Thereafter, there are three stages.
 1. First, an oil/chemical company carries out an inspection of the vessel.
 2. Second, the inspector's report (including any comments or observations) is provided to the operator for their response, and then the report in a "digested" form together with the operator's response, commonly known as "Owners comments", will be uploaded onto the SIRE or CDI database, from which other members of the system can download it as appropriate

3. At the third stage, individual members of the appropriate system oil companies, chemical companies, terminals, etc. can use the report to assist them in making their screening decisions.
 - Both the SIRE & CDI systems involve the use of a standardized checklist / form by all the inspectors involved; known as the Vessel Inspection Questionnaire (“VIQ”).
 - It may be that some organizations still maintain a system of “approvals” by which a vessel is accepted by the organization for a period. However, in most cases the vetting department of an organization will only screen a vessel and accept or reject her in relation to a particular piece of business for which the chartering department of the organization is proposing to engage her.
 - An actual screening decision will naturally be based not only on the vetting report but also (but not limited to), the individual vetting department’s perception of the owner / operator of the vessel, the vessel’s history, Port State Control record, terminal reports and also upon the particular business proposed, since the degree of risk involved will depend upon such things as the specific cargo, the loading and discharge ports, the length and route of the voyage, and indeed the time of year. Also, different organizations may be willing to accept differing levels of perceived risk. However, the vetting department will normally be willing to rely upon an inspection report downloaded from either the SIRE or CDI system, (provided the inspection was conducted sufficiently recently) and it would be unusual for a vetting department to call for a further physical inspection by one of its own inspectors.

9. The close out meeting

All inspectors should sit down and discuss observations and comments after the inspection is completed. If not, the Master should record a written objection that this has not taken place and inform his company immediately

The inspector gives the Master a written list of the observations found.

- Correct all observations as soon as possible
- Send the report to the head office or department in charge
- Complete the Inspector Feedback Form and send it together with the report (a copy is to be found at the back of this booklet)

The Master must demand a copy of these findings in writing so that should there be a change between what is said in the Master's cabin and what appears in the report, this can be taken up later by the company ashore.

When the Inspector is discussing with the Master the issues that he has found, it is quite often possible that there has been a misunderstanding or that the Inspector has become confused with another ship that he has recently done. At this point in time, it is relatively easy for such an error to be cleared up and the Master should take every step to achieve this. In addition, the Master should not feel intimidated by the inspector; this is of course easier said than done, particularly if the Master feels that he has less English skills than the Inspector in front of him. It is unlikely that the Master will be able to get the Inspector to delete a finding or an observation, even if it has been fixed, (though this should be included in the report). On the other hand, he should be able to get additional comments added which mitigate the finding or explain why it is the case.

As an example, the Inspector may find that there is a large bubble in the magnetic compass. The Master, (if it is the case), should point out to the Inspector that he already aware of this, that he has already ordered a new compass, that he has the requisition number and it is due to be delivered in the Port later on today, or whatever is the example that you choose to use. Certainly this would then turn an observation into an utterly reasonable state of affairs from one that might be considered rather more serious if it was not followed up properly by the Master.

10. Smart vetting working group

Objectives & updates:

- The One Stop Shop Concept /Terminal Acceptance: We have raised the concept of formation of a common marine assurance “system” (not methodology), which would be accessible and useable by each party concerned in the screening process.
- Advising of Non Acceptance: We have raised the issue regarding provision of information to owners to enable them to address, what may be identified as outstanding in a prompt manner.
- Conditions of Class: - Transparency to report or not to report? Major survey of members 53% response validating concerns (submitted to OCIMF GPC discussions)
- Reward Systems to Reduce Inspections: Exploration of establishing further reward systems to benefit good owners.
- Linking TMSA and the VIQ: The group undertook a review of the leading and lagging indicators between the VIQ and TMSA- potential benefits from linking TMSA with the VIQ could result in a further shift to more self-assessment.
- Officer Matrix Requirements: SIRE and CDI have advised that they are planning to seek information from owners regarding officer training systems in their respective forthcoming revised VIQ’s
- Port State Use of SIRE & CDI reports: We are reviewing the development of systems to increase the current low usage of SIRE and CDI reports by the Port State Control Authorities (Reduce the number of inspections and better target sub-standard ship)
- INTERTANKO Guide for Engaging Independent Ship Inspectors: Raised with SIRE: Potential for greater usage of our standard set of guidelines when engaging independent ship inspectors,
- Reporting to Oil/Chemical Companies: We have investigated and provided information to members regarding advice pertaining to “discoverability” in association with reporting incidents to oil and chemical companies and we are in discussion with OCIMF on this subject.
- OCIMF Committees assessing several concepts proposed

11. Terminal vetting database

- Access now opened to non-members of INTERTANKO, including tanker owners/operators, terminal owners/operators, PSC authorities and others with a legitimate interest in improving safety,
- Access to the TVD continues to remain free of charge, although access still requires agreement and compliance with the TVD's terms and conditions of use.
- Primary objective remains: The Safety of our seafarers and to benefit all with an active interest in improving the safety of the vessel at the ship shore interface.

The TVD designed with several levels of utility as follows

- Company access TVD prior to your vessel calling at the terminal, review previous comments submitted and advise your ship accordingly.
- Improve safety at the terminal : If Any ships' reports a score of "2" or less : (items rated 1-5) (<2 = low)

The terminal is automatically notified, and asked to directly provide "Terminal Comments" within 30 days for entry into the TVD. A "Low Score Alert" is sent to INTERTANKO and to the Chairman of the TVD Working Group. INTERTANKO Vetting Committee regularly discusses selected Terminal Vetting Reports (TVR's) during their bi-annual Vetting Committee meetings.

12. How to become a SIRE vetting inspector?

Every maritime professional at some point in their career thinks of doing something else apart from sailing. If you are a seafarer, you know what we are talking about. You also know that settling with an onshore job after years of sailing is easily said than done. However, fear of uncertainties shouldn't be a reason for you to give up on your dreams of taking up something new. Several maritime professionals have successfully quit sea life and settled onshore.

There are several opportunities in the maritime industry apart from sailing if you have the right certification and experience. Some of these jobs are quite similar to that of sailing but requires lesser number of days at sea. One such job is that of SIRE Vetting Inspector.

If you have worked on tanker ships or are remotely associated with them, then you would know about the highly challenging ship inspections known as SIRE Inspections. These inspections are normally conducted by an inspector called the SIRE Vetting Inspector.

Just like the jobs of surveyors and superintendent, the profile of a SIRE Vetting Inspector is also a highly rewarding. No doubt it involves traveling and can turn out to be highly stressful, but the career is surely a respectable and lucrative one.

12.1 Who are SIRE Inspectors?

All SIRE Inspectors are either licensed Masters or Chief Engineers, with a minimum of two full years of sea time as a senior officer aboard oil tankers, gas carriers or chemical tankers.

SIRE Inspectors are nominated by an OCIMF member company that participates in the SIRE program, and are then trained by OCIMF to make the inspections.

- SIRE Inspector's courses are held in London, Singapore, Japan etc.
- Multiple accompanied inspections prior to the initial audit. Not everyone passes.
- Refresher course every three years.
- Audited inspection every three years.

12.2 What do SIRE vetting inspectors do?

SIRE vetting inspectors are required to report on vessels or operational deficiencies, to detail both positive and negative comments on the vessel's operation. They then make reports with the found deficiencies (rating them from High to Low risks) and give it to the vessel master at the end of every inspection. Vessels with "High risks" cannot be used until all observations have been closed out.

12.3 Ship inspector training and accreditation procedures

SIRE Inspectors are mainly divided into 3 categories. They are as follows:

Category 1: Oil, Chemical and Gas Carriers plus vessels listed under Category 2 and 3.

Category2: Small Oil Tankers of less than 5000 tons DWT and Chemical Tankers and Gas Carriers of less than 500 Tons Gross Tonnage plus vessels listed under Category 3.

Category 3: Barges together with tugs that are associated with movement of barges, and also vessels that are used for carriage of packaged cargoes.

12.4 Guidelines/requirements for becoming a successful SIRE vetting inspector

All prospective Inspectors must, in first instance, apply to be an OCIMF member to undertake a necessary training leading to an examination and accreditation. Only OCIMF members are eligible to nominate an applicant for accreditation. Once an applicant is approved, OCIMF will arrange for the applicant to attend an approved SIRE Inspector Training Course and sit for the examination at an OCIMF designated examination center.

It is to note that employees of vessel operators are not eligible to attain SIRE Inspector Accreditation.

Category 1 Inspectors: Must hold or have held a valid Master's/Chief Engineer's License from recognized Flag State for vessels of 3000 GT/ 3000 KW or more. Must have at least 5 years actual sea service aboard tankers of which not less than 2 years must have been senior officer on board a tanker and shall hold or have held Certificate of Advanced Training appropriate to the type of Vessel to be inspected or proof of satisfactory training under STCW Convention/Code, with a valid OCIMF Ship Inspector Training and Accreditation program.

Category 2 Inspectors: Must hold or have held a valid Master's/Chief Engineer's License from recognized Flag State for vessels between 500 and 3000 GT/750 and 3000 KW Propulsion Power.

The work experience and other certification remain the same as listed above for Category 1 Inspectors.

Category 3 Inspectors: Must hold or have held Certificate of Competency as Master or Officer In charge of navigation watch of ships less than 500 Gross tonnage issued by recognized Flag State **Or**

Certificate of Competency as Second Engineer issued by recognized Flag State **Or**

Nationally recognized Barge Master's License **Or**

Nationally recognized Barge Chief Engineer's License **Or**

Extensive day-to-day experience in Barge Operations or Barge Terminal Management

Must have served at least 2 years on the type of vessel to be inspected or have undergone suitable training to inspect Category 3 Vessels with Certificate of Advanced Training appropriate to the type of Vessel to be Inspected, Or a certificate issued by Local Authority of Equivalent standard.

The training of all these Inspectors is carried out in UK with SIRE Courses and Examinations. The applicants are exposed to various topics of International and

Industry Structures, IMO, Vetting, OCIMF, SIRE, Accessing the SIRE website and Downloading Reports, The conduct of an Inspection and use of VIQ/ROVIQ and its questions and explanation of the features and use of SIRE VIQ software. Additional training is carried out for those Inspectors willing to inspect Chemical/Gas carriers.

All applicants are required to pass a written General Examination at the end of training Course and undertake on-board training in form of accompanied inspections and finally, successfully undertake an on-board Audit in presence of SIRE Accredited Auditing Inspector.

12.5 Knowledge and capability of above listed inspectors:

SIRE Inspectors must be able to demonstrate familiarity and knowledge of International Guidelines, Codes and Conventions with various Regulations, Procedures and Standards appropriate to the type of vessel being inspected (SOLAS, ISM, ISGOTT, STCW, ICS, and OCIMF).

They should be proficient in English and be physically fit to carry out the Inspection of Vessel. The inspector should also be warm and behave ethically and co-operate with the Ship Staff. This post is highly demanding and needs planning at a very early stage in one's career. It also involves a lot of hard work and dedication.

People sailing on Tankers (Oil/Gas/Chemical) or those who wants to become SIRE Vetting Inspector must start building contacts in the industry and keep healthy relationship with these inspectors who visit their vessel at the time of Inspection. You can also take their details and get in touch with them if required as many of them are more than happy to help.

Conclusion

Vetting inspections minimize the chances of pollution by oil and maximize tanker safety onboard. They are complex processes which require a lot of hard work for the preparation of the ship. There are a lot of points that need attention and that is why just checking their status alone takes a lot of time. It is very difficult to pass a vetting inspection without observations but not getting any major observation is really helpful for the ship, as it renders it ready to charter. Help is provided from the SIRE program with VIQs (Vessel Inspection Questionnaires) which contain observations and points to be checked before the inspection. The conclusion of the inspection comes with the close out meeting between the captain and the inspectors to discuss the observations and make sure that they will be taken care of as soon as possible. Inspectors are not to be underestimated because they are experienced seamen (far more experienced than any crew member) that know their way around the tanker.

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