Increasing safety awareness, overcoming barriers to information

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Sweden and the Swedish Maritime Administration warmely welcome this seminar on safety at sea for smaller vessels and boats. Some of our experiences may help other countries in their efforts to improve safety at sea.

Different countries face different conditions – cultural, geographical, geological, hydrographical and not least of all economic. These can affect what we do to develop and strengthen safety at sea.

There are no simple or uniform solutions. Safety at sea can be achieved only by strong commitment and collaboration, by joint effort towards a common goal. Better awareness about safety at sea is a very essential first step – it leads to better ability.

We think governments hold the prime responsibility for systems to improve safety at sea. But various interest groups and related industries must be involved as well, and should be encouraged to help out and do their bit. Because safety at sea is complex and challenging and requires the co-operation of all stakeholders.

International co-operation and action are vital. Sweden therefore plays an active role in IMO. It tries to strengthen international instruments and conventions like SOLAS (Safety of Life at Sea). Internally, it does its best to strengthen disaster prevention, through a network of coastal radio stations and warning systems that cover mariners of all kinds including operators of small crafts.

Over the years, excellent co-operation has been developed between the authorities and workers' unions on safety issues and on matters like qualifications of workers, communication, floating devices, etc. There is always scope for improving such co-operation.

Swedish authorities believe that there are principally two attitudes toward safety at sea. Reactive – responding to events that have already occurred. Proactive – characterised by preventive actions

This article is based on the presentation made by Mr Mats Rosander-Liew at the Third International Conference on Fishing Industry Safety and Health, Mahabalipuram, 1-4 February 2006.

Sweden has 750 000 leisure craft. Three-fourths of all sea-rescue effort in Sweden relate to leisure craft.

on the basis of experience and knowledge, with the development process never allowed to stagnate.

We have achieved success through proactive use of hardware (coastal radio, VHF, SAR, etc.) and software (working with people to increase safety awareness and change attitudes towards safety at sea).

Over time we have reduced the number of serious accidents, including drowning, that occur with both large and small vessels. We have done so by effectively tapping many aids, tools and resources such as:

- Mass media: press, radio, TV and Internet
- Coastal radio stations
- Weather reporting
- Search and rescue organisations
- Waterproof communication equipment
- Floating devices development
- Emergency flares
- Supporting innovations

Safety efforts directed at men – who figure most frequently in accident statistics – are of little use. To change attitudes, we must be unconventional and work with wives and children. Women are more concerned about safety at sea than men. If we involve women more actively with safety at sea effort, there would be fewer accidents. Sweden believes that preventive safety at sea activities must begin with the family.

Methods we have used to reach people with information to increase safety:

- Getting a strong organisation behind us, the Swedish Maritime Administration and the Sea Safety Council*
- Organising campaigns in pre-schools and schools
- Preparing brochures for children and adults
- Preparing Internet materials
- Television for children and adults
- Organising special programmes for special target groups
- Organising seasonal events all over the country
- Mobilising the Sea Safety Council: the Coast Guard, the police, the Swedish Rescue Service Agency, the Swedish Sea Rescue Society, the Swedish Marine Industries Federation, the Swedish Lifesaving Organisation, insurance companies, boating organisations, diving organisations, the guest harbour organisation.

Despite all that we have done, the best of conditions and the best of intentions, a person drowns every third day in Sweden even today. Some 35 people drown every year in leisure-craft related accidents. (More than half of them are men over 50.) Drowning is in fact the most common cause of death among children, after traffic accidents. Only six out of 10 local educational authorities in Sweden follow the curriculum in teaching children to swim. In certain Swedish schools, only two out of 10 pupils can swim 200 metres.

Safety at sea in developing countries

Let me move from safety at sea status and action in Sweden to that in developing countries. May I suggest that a few specific questions be asked.

- For whom, for which target group, is safety at sea a major issue? Who has the responsibility to address it?
- Are safety-at-sea issues for small vessels on the agenda of the relevant committees?
- What responsibilities do states, local and other authorities have for
  - infrastructure
  - legislation
  - control
  - sanctions?
- What is the current status of infrastructure, weather reporting

Left: One of the many posters and publicity materials on safety at sea. Right: Life jackets are worn even while boating in a shallow lake, as a matter of abundant precaution.

systems, wind and cyclone warnings, communication systems, and SAR (search and rescue) systems, for these smaller vessels?

- Is any disaster prevention effort being mounted on the basis of past experiences?
- Is the ability to swim mandatory in schools? Is it as important in coastal areas to be able to swim as it is to read, write and do arithmetic?
- Is there an economic driving force for increased safety at sea, from the perspective of the state, the local authority or any other authority?
- What sort of representation and what influence do these organisations have? Are the control instruments considered to be fair?
- How do these authorities look at issues such as training, equipment, regulation of catches, territorial waters, etc?
- What about the individual fisherman? How can he contribute better to his own safety? How active is his participation? Are there common, accepted, understood strategies, goals and activities? Will anybody listen?
- Is there an economic driving force for increased safety at sea, from an individual perspective?
- What are the negative factors that hinder or inhibit safety at sea?
  - Is the issue regarded as too insignificant economically?
  - Are the people in question, the fishers, regarded as too small and insignificant?
  - Are the fishers un-organised? Is it difficult to establish communication with them?
  - Are safety at sea issues regarded as too expensive to be tackled and solved?
  - Are there ego problems? Do the fishers and fisher groups believe – "We can decide the size of our catches ourselves!"
  - Do they think – "We don't want to be controlled by others"?
  - Does competition among fishers and fisher groups inhibit co-operation and collaboration?
  - Is money an issue? Training, education and equipment cost money. Cost-effective approaches and solutions must be adopted.

Boats, accidents and sea rescue in Sweden:

- 750 000 leisure craft
- Every tenth citizen of Sweden has a boat.
- 90 percent of boats are within sea rescue areas.
- 80 percent always have life jackets for everybody onboard.
- 75 percent of all sea rescue operations (1 000 per year) relate to leisure craft.
- 35 people drown every year in leisure craft- related accidents. The cause is frequently falling overboard in conjunction with fishing alone.
- 100 people a year are seriously injured as a result of leisure craft-related accidents.

How can Sweden help?

a. We can share our experiences on follow-up to drowning cases, and on enabling prevention through media campaigns: print, TV, etc.

b. Share our brochures that contain general information.

c. Support activities to explain safety at sea questions in schools. Help formulate course plans for schools.

d. Work actively with the interface between the product (boat and equipment) and human behaviour.

e. Start and assist pilot projects on safety at sea questions.
   - Fishing teams in collaboration
   - Education on "sea safety thinking"
   - Active Coastal Zone Management (CZM) surrounding these questions
   - Other material innovations