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COVID-19: Hanseaticsoft urges shipping companies to help seafarers reduce stress

• Wednesday, 25 March 2020 | [Communications & Cyber Security](#)



As Stress Awareness month in April coincides with a global pandemic, maritime software provider Hanseaticsoft is urging shipping companies to tackle stress and depression amongst seafarers by ensuring connectivity at sea.

During the coronavirus crisis this is even more imperative, says Hanseaticsoft. Global travel restrictions and changes to crew change over frequencies could start to have a negative impact on seafarer's health and wellbeing if they have to stay on their ship longer than usual.

The International Maritime Organization (IMO) has issued a statement recognising frontline workers in the shipping industry and highlighting the importance of their health and safety at sea.

The International Chamber of Shipping and the International Transport Workers' Federation have also stressed the importance of seafarers in global trade and supply chains. They say 100,000 seafarers must change over every month to comply with regulations and calls for them to be classed as 'key workers' to enable this to continue.

However, several shipping companies have announced they have suspended crew changes because of the coronavirus, potentially meaning longer stretches at sea.

Alexander Buchmann, managing director, Hanseaticsoft said: "Stress and depression amongst seafarers is common. Long spells at sea and increasing workloads can seriously impact seafarers' health and wellbeing. With the coronavirus situation this could be made even worse for crew with more time away from their family and potentially having to self-isolate if they show symptoms.

"One easy solution to help workers manage this is providing personal internet access. This can enable seafarers to keep in touch with family and friends whilst at sea which can help improve their mood, it can also mean crew are able to access up-to-date information on the health crisis. They can make use of apps to access mental health support or other groups and organisations too."

The latest Seafarers Happiness Index highlights that seafarer happiness dropped in the final quarter of 2019 and research by the Sailors' Society and Yale University suggests that more than a quarter of seafarers suffer from depression – and many won't ask for help.

Another survey by the International Chamber of Shipping (ICS) and the European Community Shipowners' Associations (ECSA) found that 60 per cent of respondents said that the provision of internet access to seafarers for personal use may have improved the mental health and wellbeing of seafarers and 69 per cent believe it is good for morale.

Ensuring seafarers get enough rest and stick to legal limits on how many hours they can work is also essential. Not having enough sleep can boost the body's level of stress hormones which becomes a vicious circle for those already stressed. Work stress and impaired sleep are linked to a threefold higher risk of cardiovascular death in employees with hypertension, according to a study in the European Journal of Preventive Cardiology.

Hanseaticsoft is helping companies prevent tiredness and improve the health and wellbeing of seafarers with its Rest Hours Module, part of the company's Cloud Crewing software solution. This digitalises and centralises the management of rest hours via cloud technology.

It allows crews to enter their own rest hours rather than relying on someone else to collect and enter the data. This means they can access their own data and ensure the correct times have been entered.

"In Stress Awareness month we want companies to consider the wellbeing of seafarers and look at how they could help improve their working environment. Ensuring crews get enough rest is one way to do this. With the global coronavirus pandemic it's even more important for companies to look after the health and wellbeing of crew," continued Buchmann.

"Having internet access at sea means that shipping companies can make use of cloud technology solutions, which can assist in every aspect of crew management and administration, including health and wellbeing. Introducing these measures now will help them over the coming months as well as help future proof their business."