

InterManager: Criminalization of Seafarers is unacceptable

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by [*The Maritime Executive*](#)



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This year's Day of the Seafarer celebration is focused on reducing harassment at sea, a challenge of the seafaring life since the days of sail - present on countless ships, often undiscussed, often invisible to shoreside personnel. Though ubiquitous and discouraging, harassment is far from the only challenge seafarers face. Ahead of Day of the Seafarer, InterManager - the industry association for ship managers - has highlighted another growing risk: criminalization of seafarers' actions in the unfortunate event of a casualty.

Accidents happen in shipping, and while sinkings and total losses are less common than they once were, large fires, collisions or spills attract the attention of coastal state authorities - including local prosecutors. In case after case, seafarers have been criminally investigated or charged for negative outcomes, even when the events are wholly beyond their control. In the latest example, the surviving crewmembers of the boxship *Wan Hai 503* face negligence charges in India for the explosion of a containerized cargo - a cargo that they did not book, pack or load.

"Seafarers are often unfairly blamed and convicted when their vessel is involved in a maritime incident," added the International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF) in a statement. "The situations in which seafarers can get caught up in criminal investigations include incidences of marine pollution, accidents at sea or even in port, and when illicit cargo is found on board. They are sometimes convicted and imprisoned, even when there is no evidence of wrongdoing."

As for this year's Day of the Seafarer's theme of reducing harassment, InterManager is taking that seriously too. IMO is encouraging shipping to do better with an awareness campaign, but InterManager has called for stricter measures.

"Harassment is a safety issue and should be treated with the same urgency and seriousness as any other life-threatening risk at sea. What we need is real enforcement, not just policies or pledges," said InterManager Secretary General Capt. Kuba Szymanski.