

Half the world fleet is failing on LRIT rules

Owners buy systems to beat looming deadline

Craig Eason - Tuesday 3 November 2009

HALF the world's fleet could still be non-compliant with the mandatory long-range identification and tracking rules — and despite assurances they will not have to bear any costs, some owners have bought new systems to meet requirements.

LRIT reporting became compulsory earlier this year after a lot of political argument over how the information was to be stored and shared.

Every vessel over 300 gt is now required to transmit its position every six hours to a data centre, which has been created on behalf of its flag administration. But according to the International Mobile Satellite Organisation, only half of the anticipated data centres that will receive position information from a vessel are operational. IMSO hopes this figure will increase to 80% by the end of the year.

Initially, IMSO expected about 40 data centres to be created, but has revised that figure upwards to 67, although only 37 are yet working.

While LRIT reporting became mandatory at the beginning of this year, there was general agreement among port states that compliance inspections would not begin until half way through the year. Many countries had yet to set up their data centres into which the position data would be sent and shipowners had yet to put suitable satellite systems onboard, or adapt existing equipment.

Port state inspectors are now beginning to clamp down on violations of Solas chapter five, the section of the Safety of Life at Sea Convention that deals with position reporting and other safety of navigation issues.

Paris Memorandum of Understanding general secretary Peter Schiferli said port state inspectors from the Paris MoU have focused on whether ships have the suitable hardware for compliance.

Although he could not say whether any vessels have been detained due to lack of equipment, he said that port states had reported a number of incidents of ships being non-compliant for not having suitable equipment to automatically transmit their position, or not having crews aware of the requirements.

Other sources have suggested that at least one vessel has been detained for not having equipment on board. But inspectors might soon focus on ensuring that vessels were fully LRIT compliant, Mr Schiferli said.

“Part of the LRIT system is the hardware and the other is transmitting the position to the data centre,” he said. There is now discussion in the Paris MoU over what to do with ships that have the hardware and can transmit their position, but have no data centre to report into.

Members of the Paris MoU will decide in May next year whether it will begin detaining vessels that have fully compliant equipment and the ability to transmit positions, but have not been given a data centre by their flag administration.

The earlier confusion over compliance and ability to report had also led to some owners purchasing standalone reporting equipment rather than adapt existing equipment or risk delays due to detention, said Danish communication hardware specialist Thrane and Thrane. It said it had sold more than 10,000 small stand-alone units to owners who were worried about not being compliant on time and had older legacy satellite systems.

This is despite the International Maritime Organization stating when it introduced mandatory LRIT that owners

should not have to pay for onboard changes or for data transmission.

While many satellite systems are easily adaptable, there was uncertainty among owners, according to Thrane and Thrane safety and tracking manager Henrik Dyrholm. Owing to the short period before compliance was mandatory, many owners had opted to buy and install their own systems, he said.

IMSO head of technical services Andy Fuller said the decision to install a standalone unit would have been entirely the shipowner's choice. While he was surprised by the alleged number of units sold by Thrane and Thrane, he said the majority of vessels would have had their Inmarsat-C units, which are used for the ship safety alert system, adapted to allow for the regular position signals to be sent.

IMSO acts as the LRIT co-ordinator and will begin annual auditing the data centres next year to ensure they are compliant and the right data is being exchanged via the international data exchange.

Early indications are that there is information being sold between the relevant authorities wishing to know about vessel movements, even though a proper pricing and payment structure has yet to be developed.



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