

Investment is needed to curb oily violations

The Nautical Institute's Captain Harry Gale recently highlighted lack of investment in crew training and facilities as contributing to the spate of multimillion-dollar penalties and arrests in the US and Europe for oily-water-discharge (OWS) violations.

He points out that studies show 12% of marine pollution comes from ship operation with 68% of that a result of fuel-oil sludge.

Owners and crew say that dated OWS equipment is also difficult and awkward to use and is prone to break downs.

Oily-water-separator manufacturers have been working on products that help address the problem and meet new International Maritime Organisation (IMO) guidelines.

Alfa Laval's Michael Kleman, manager of the marine and diesel equipment department, says in the past yards have fitted equipment that is not up to the job. He said: "The simple coalescer systems have an IMO certificate and are cheap so the yards buy them but they often don't live up to the demands put on bilge separators from real life emulsions. A majority of our systems are bought directly by owners to be installed on existing ships to replace poor performing systems."

And his company has been developing its oily-water and bilge-water treatment equipment, known as Ecostream, to meet the problem of OWS violations in response to owner's requests.

"The Ecostream is continuously revised on user feedback on new functions. This autumn we released an updated product that includes optional features such as tampering prevention of the oil

monitor and a recording function for discharge data, like flow rate, flow volumes, oil content," he said.

US-based Genoil has started marketing its new product, Crystal Sea, in response to tougher IMO guidelines and also hopes that existing ships will take on the product.

Chief executive James Runyan said: "At present, it is restricted to newbuilds but the larger shipping companies are looking into and testing units for retrofit on their existing fleet."

Runyan says a key factor in the product's development was to make it easier for seafarers to use.

He said: "Our goal was to design a unit that was simple to operate, required no back flushing, no filter to change and very little if any maintenance. Once the unit is installed and started, it only has one moving part, the pump, and can be operated with very simple instructions."

And making the equipment difficult to tamper with also played a part in the product development. "We have and can install instrumentation that will verify the oil in water being discharged, record the positions of the valves and other items that can not be changed or tampered with by the crew or operator on board the ship," he said.

However, Gale warns that training is just as if not more important than equipment. He says there is a real need for owners to train crew more effectively and not just pay lip service to the International Safety Management code. "The motivation and empowerment of ship's staff to comply with the regulations is essential," he said.



OILY VIOLATIONS: Example of an oily-water separator

Photo: USMMA