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DP – Don't Lose Control!

There have been several reports of incidents on Dynamic Positioning (DP) vessels where control was lost because the DP operator (DPO) failed to correctly switch control between different operating stations.

Investigations rarely find the cause to be a technical malfunction or an issue with the DP system set up, such as a network error. It is more often caused simply by the incorrect actions of the DPOs.

The importance of redundancy

In some cases, these incidents have been a result of a momentary lapse in concentration, which can happen to anyone. But just like the DP system itself, bridge teams should have redundancy, which is why best practise, such as that found in the Oil Companies International Marine Forum (OCIMF) DP Assurance Framework, is to have at least two DPOs on the bridge. This means that with good communication and teamwork, potential mistakes can be spotted and avoided.

Experience is key

It goes without saying that all ship managers check that their DPOs are qualified and that they have the suitable DP qualifications for the vessel. But experience matters hugely.

Therefore, ship operators can consider checking a new DPO's previous experience; have they previously used the DP equipment on your vessels? Was their DP time gained doing similar tasks to those required on your vessels?

Ship operators should be aware that DPOs often show their experience by logging DP hours. However, there is a risk that these might be misleading, so seek references from their previous employment.

Getting familiar

All joining DPOs should undergo a structured and thorough familiarisation. This familiarisation should

include reading and understanding:

- all relevant operator manuals for the DP equipment on board
- any DP incident reports that have occurred
- Failure Modes and Effects Analysis (FMEA)
- DP trials reports
- all DP related checklists.

The International Marine Contractors Association (IMCA) publication M109 outlines all DP related documentation that should be considered. Some of this can be studied at any time, even before joining.

The familiarisation should be vessel-specific and outlined in the vessel's safety management system (SMS). Masters should satisfy themselves that it is carried out fully and the DPO understands the vessel's requirements.

This familiarisation must include setting up in DP and, importantly, how to switch between control modes. Switching between control modes must be done in full accordance with manufacturer's guidelines and not "how I have always done it". Switching modes can be practised prior to being in operation and under the strict supervision of the Master or their deputy.

Understanding location specifics

DP vessels can be engaged in a whole range of different operations. So, the DPO should familiarise themselves with Activity Specific Operating Guidelines (ASOG) as well. The ASOG will detail how the operations should be done for that specific field or task, as well as the modes of control the vessel should operate in. This will show the DPO when they can and cannot switch control modes, based on the risks involved.

It's not all on the crew!

Managers of DP vessels must ensure that the systems and procedures allow for a thorough vessel-specific familiarisation for all DPOs that come on board.

Thought must be given to the time they allow DPOs to gain familiarity, not only with the vessel but with the ASOG which will have an impact on how the vessel operates in the field. They should ensure their procedures tie in with the ASOG and are not just generic for DP operations. Familiarisation becomes even more critical if deploying agency crew rather than direct employees.

Also consider continuous professional development options to ensure DPOs do not suffer from knowledge fade and are regularly reminded of best practise guidance and requirements.

Find out more

Ship operators are encouraged to follow IMCA M 117 – *Guidelines for the Training and Experience of Key*

DP personnel. This contains guidance on crew familiarisation and training to assist in preventing such incidents onboard a copy can be found [here](#).

Source of Information: The North P&I Club

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