

On 1 October 2010 the new Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS) regulations come into force. SOLAS is a long-standing set of safety regulations first adopted in 1914 as a response to the *Titanic* disaster, regularly updated with safety amendments. This time, the amendments could have further-reaching implications than safety; they may also have an impact environmentally.

Retrospective changes

The 2010 amendment differs in one important way – it applies to existing ships, not just new builds. This means that all older ships must be brought up to the SOLAS standard by the deadline.

In the past, major changes to SOLAS were restricted to new ships and were not

retrospective. Major equipment and structural changes involve expensive modifications, so cruise operators may be understandably reluctant to implement such measures.

The new rules could see the retirement of ships built in the 1970s, when vessels were required to have sprinkler systems or use non-combustible materials – but not both.

‘There are significant improvements to fire safety on newer vessels at Prestige,’ says David Larimer, senior director of fleet compliance at Prestige Cruise Holdings.

‘Materials in key locations are now low-flame spread and subject to smoke and toxicity testing. Sprinklers are much more efficient than before, and smoke and fire detection systems provide more detailed information as to the location and nature of a fire.

‘Many amendments to safety regulations such as SOLAS exist because of hard lessons learnt in the course of accident investigations. They’re necessary so that we can guarantee the highest possible level of safety to our guests and crew.’

Of course, those ships already free of combustibles can simply install sprinkler systems – but to remove existing combustible materials involves stripping a ship back to the bare hull and starting again, which could prove too expensive for some lines to justify.

Environmental benefits

This all means that the new safety amendments reach much further than simple rules. By necessitating the retirement of older ships, the amendments take old systems out of the equation.

The 2010 SOLAS regulations will break with previous amendments by requiring older ships to be brought up to the standards of new builds. Jane Labous talks to Prestige Cruise’s David Larimer, the World Ocean Council’s Paul Holthus and Carnival Corporation’s Tom Strang about how the industry is gearing up for big changes.

Safer seas



For Paul Holthus, executive director of the World Ocean Council, upgrading ships should mean less impact on the environment.

'The World Ocean Council is focused on ocean sustainability issues so from our point of view the knock-on effect of these regulations is very important,' he says. 'Newer ships mean newer design and construction and, as a result, vessels that are designed to have less impact on the environment. This demonstrates that we should look for multiple benefits from rulings such as SOLAS 2010.'

'As an industry, we should be thinking more laterally and inclusively to help increase the validity of such changes and make them further reaching.'

Positive steps

However, cruise operators are largely positive about the new regulations and do not anticipate a culling of elderly ships.

'We don't have a lot to worry about on this topic because all of our ships already meet these requirements and therefore are not affected,' says Larimer. 'We have newer vessels that already meet the requirements. None of our vessels are affected by the retroactive fire safety amendments.'

Tom Strang, VP of policy and regulation at Carnival Corporation, says the company will not be retiring any of its ships, while pointing out that such regulations are beneficial for passenger safety and the environment.

'The ships we have under construction comply with all the existing requirements and we'll be developing new designs and prototypes to meet the requirements as well. Our oldest ships date from the 1980s and in some cases the new requirements are already incorporated,' Strang says.

'From Carnival's perspective the environment is of prime importance and all our ships are compliant to environmental management standards, we have environmental officers on every one of our ships. We take it very seriously.'

'Safety in its widest sense, including in relation to the environment, is of prime importance at Carnival and we are definitely going to see more environmental legislation such as this going through.'

The bigger picture

Indeed, according to Strang and Holthus, the SOLAS 2010 regulations are part of a bigger picture.

'There are many new regulations coming into place and we are working actively to comply,' says Strang.

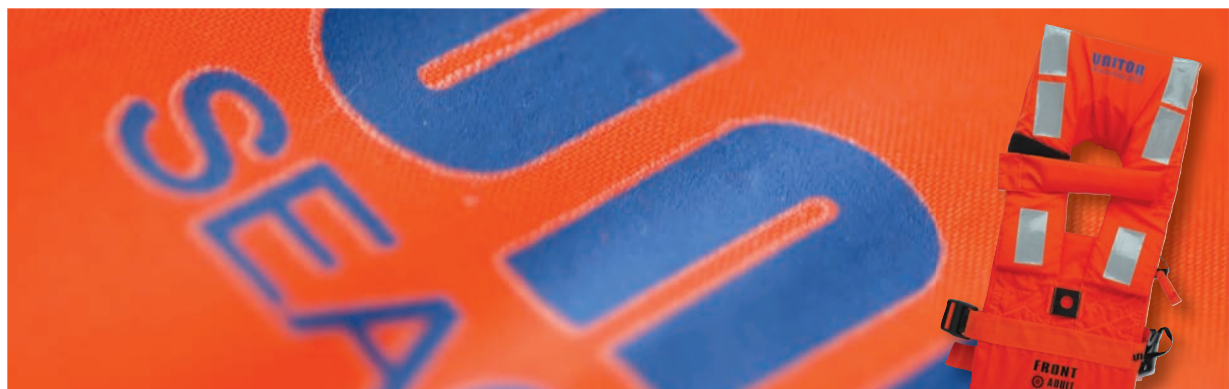
'While there is a recession in the financial markets, there certainly isn't a recession in environmental legislation and we're seeing more coming through in almost all areas – the Baltic, Alaska and the Arctic.'

'The key for the industry as a whole is not to look at any of these issues in isolation but to look at the bigger picture.'

'We aim to work with the cruise industry to help encourage and promote port reception facilities. This is very much needed and we in the industry have been working hard to persuade governments that more port facilities are needed to deal with liquid and solid waste offloading in port.'

'There have been good advances in addressing these issues on board cruise ships, as obviously these are the kind of problems which continue to give the cruise industry a bad name.'

'More generally, by engaging on broader issues such as the environment the cruise industry could be seen to be improving and moving forward.' **wc**



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