

# The administrative burdens of a modern shipmaster

During the April session of the FAL Committee, Denmark hosted a presentation where the Danish Captain Christian Rørbeck shed light on the administrative burdens faced by ships on a daily basis around the world. The specific examples of administrative burdens for a container ship in service were an eye-opener for delegates. Charlotte Asgaard Andersen of the Danish Maritime Authority reports

Captain Christian Rørbeck has 27 years of experience travelling the oceans as an employee of a major Danish company – the last nine years as a master. He has sailed the equivalent of 66 times around the world and has made calls to 113 different ports in 38 different countries, so he truly knows the administrative requirements that ships meet worldwide.

In a humorous and thought-provoking way, he told about his own hands-on experience with the large administrative burdens he had encountered. The focus of the presentation was on the FAL forms and the countless local variants of these in connection with port calls in 17 randomly selected ports around the world.

## Ship stamps make the world go around

According to the captain, the problem is not the port and pre-arrival documents in themselves; the problem lies in the amount of paperwork and the fact that each port has its own requirements regarding paperwork to be submitted both prior to and on arrival. In his own estimate, he spends 80 per cent of his work time on paperwork.

Many ports have requirements for pre-arrival information. The time limit for sending this information is not the same globally, which means that some ports want the information 24 hours in advance, others 48 hours in advance, and others, 72 hours in advance. There are also examples of ports that require some of the information 48 hours in advance and other information 24 hours in advance. It was noted by Captain Rørbeck that some port authorities do not report back whether or not they have received the submitted information.

In addition, the shipping companies'

agents handle the reporting in some ports, whereas the master must communicate directly with the port authorities in others. This goes for both port and pre-arrival documents.

Upon arrival, each port also has its own requirements regarding the paperwork that must be submitted. Some of the information may already have been submitted electronically, but on port arrival the same documents must be printed, signed and stamped.

In the words of Captain Rørbeck: "Without the ship's stamp, the shipping world would stop...".

## Different ports, different requirements

In his presentation, Captain Rørbeck showed how many copies of each document the 17 randomly selected ports require. 12 of the ports require more copies than recommended in the FAL Convention and 11 have developed their own national forms. These local forms are sometimes provided in the local

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language which may cause problems to the master of the ship if he does not speak it.

Among the more peculiar documentation requirements presented by Captain Rørbeck was a port asking for the quantity of wine in tanks or barrels carried on board the ship, and another asking for the number of detergents containing alcohol.

### My name is...

As an example of the different requirements made by the ports, Captain Rørbeck talked about the crew lists. In the ports he has called upon, he has experienced several different formats for listing the names of the crew. You would think that the names were the same everywhere in the world, but unfortunately not. Some ports require that you write the name as on an airline ticket: Rørbeck, Christian E. But since the comma is not in the passport, some ports require another format: Rørbeck Christian E. Still others require the names in reverse order with the given name first: Christian E. Rørbeck. Finally, some require each name in a separate column.

Also, some ports require that Mr. is written on the crew list, whereas it absolutely cannot be written on the crew list in other ports. All changes to the crew lists must be made manually when calling on a port, which is very time consuming.



Captain Christian Rørbeck gave a presentation about administrative burdens at the FAL Committee in April.

### Multiple port calls in the same region

Several of the European countries have joined the Schengen agreement. There are no border controls when transiting from one country to another within the Schengen area. However, every time a ship calls on a port, all the paperwork has to be prepared and submitted. Captain Rørbeck showed that, for a ship travelling to six countries in the Schengen area, a total of 80 documents must be prepared and 42 documents must be sent in advance.

Even for a ship calling on multiple ports within the same country, there are examples of countries where all the paperwork must be prepared and submitted for each port.

### A way forward

After listing all of his examples of the administrative requirements that ships must deal with when calling on ports around the world, Captain Rørbeck also gave his inputs on solutions that will reduce the amount of paperwork for the masters.

First of all, a single entry reporting point for each country/region should be established. This could be done along the lines of the aviation sector where a person can travel freely within the borders once he has entered the country. Secondly, the countries and ports should accept electronic forms in order to make it easier for the ships to reuse data from one port to the next. Finally, the number of port documents should be set to a minimum and the international forms should be accepted instead of the ports developing their own local forms.

In the opinion of Captain Rørbeck, such solutions are necessary because they, on the one hand, will reduce the costs of operating a ship. On the other hand, reducing the administrative requirements on the master will allow him to spend time on the primary task – that is, ensuring the safe navigation of his vessel in order to protect her crew, her cargo and the environment.



According to Captain Christian Rørbeck, reducing the administrative burdens will allow the master to spend more time on safety, security and protecting the environment.