

MRCC spares no effort to accomplish its missions

When typhoons hit Hong Kong and most people are released from work, staff of the Hong Kong Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre (MRCC) continue to carry out their duties round-the-clock during adverse weather, and stand ready to coordinate search and rescue for ships and persons at sea in distress situations. How does MRCC operate 24 hours a day throughout the year to coordinate Search and Rescue (SAR)? In this issue of the Hong Kong Maritime News, it is our pleasure to invite Senior Marine Officer/SAR, Mr. Leu Kun Man to offer us a deeper understanding of MRCC's operation.

Leu: At any time in MRCC, we always have a Marine Officer (MO) grade colleague, who has undergone intensive training in SAR coordination, as the duty controller and a Marine Inspector (MI) Grade I officer (MI I) as Global Maritime Distress & Safety System (GMDSS) operator on duty, both assisted by a MI Grade II officer. Whenever a typhoon hits Hong Kong, we will have an additional MI on duty because it is possible that many vessels encounter marine incidents at the same time during inclement weather. I still remember when Super Typhoon Hato hit the estuary of the Pearl River on 23 August 2017, MRCC received distress signals from 17 vessels within a short period of time involving requests for assistance from over 100 seafarers. As requested by the Guangdong Rescue Coordination Center, MRCC provided assistance and coordinated with relevant units to successfully rescue a total of 50 seafarers from 6 vessels.

Editor: Could you tell us about the equipment and daily duties of MRCC?

Leu: MRCC is equipped with various systems that enable us to monitor distress signals emitted from vessels and to communicate with seafarers. Our GMDSS, composed of antennas and high-powered radio transceivers located in Mount Bulter, the Victoria Peak and Cape D'Aguilar, etc., can detect the distress signals emitted by vessels.

The shore-based GMDSS is comprised of radio transmitter receivers that can operate through intermediate frequency, high frequency, and very high frequency channels to receive digital distress alerts, as well as the Global Satellite Search and Rescue System which can receive distress signals emitted from vessels' Emergency Position Indicating Radio Beacon (EPIRB). Apart from these, MRCC is also equipped with other communication software and hardware, which enable us to make enhanced

group calls to vessels in specific areas through the SafetyNET of the International Maritime Satellite Organization (INMARSAT).

The MI I on duty, who has received relevant training on the systems, is responsible for monitoring distress signals. Once receiving a distress signal, the duty officer will verify the authenticity of the vessel incident. The team will immediately coordinate available resources to carry out a SAR mission if the vessel is confirmed to be in distress situation, including dispatching SAR units and making enhanced group calls to request assistance from vessels in the vicinity and so on.

In addition, MRCC also consults doctors of the Department of Health's Port Health Division so as to provide medical advice to seafarers. If needed, arrangements will be made to evacuate ill or injured seafarers from ship to hospital for treatment.

Editor: For marine incidents occur outside Hong Kong waters, will the SAR procedure be different from that for those within Hong Kong waters?

Leu: For SAR cases occur within Hong Kong waters, MRCC draws resources from the Hong Kong Marine Police, the Government Flying Service (GFS), the Fire Services Department and the Marine Department (MD) to perform the SAR mission.

For those occur outside Hong Kong waters, MRCC relies on the assistance of other vessels in the vicinity of the distress and GFS. MRCC will also consider to request other Rescue Coordination Centers (RCCs) to render assistance, such as Mainland China, the Philippines and Vietnam. All along, MRCC maintains a very good working relationship with other RCCs in the region.

In July this year, a Mainland engineering vessel was hit by Typhoon Chaba in the Mainland waters off 160 nautical miles south-west of Hong Kong. Emergency rescue service was requested to evacuate the seafarers. Upon request of Guangdong Provincial Maritime Search and Rescue Centre, MRCC immediately coordinated with GFS to carry out SAR mission and successfully rescued 3 of the crew members.

Editor: Does MRCC serve functions other than SAR work?

Leu: MRCC also assists in handling security matters of Hong Kong registered vessels outside Hong Kong. In case a Hong Kong flagged ship encounters pirates outside Hong Kong waters, MRCC will notify the local RCC of the area concerned

for assistance.

MRCC also assumes a coordination role to handle marine incidents within Hong Kong waters, such as vessel collisions, oil pollution and cargoes falling overboard.

Editor: MRCC is really charged with heavy responsibilities!

Profile of MRCC

- ▶MRCC, under MD's Port Control Division, was formally established in 1989.

- ▶MRCC is responsible for coordinating all maritime SAR matters for waters of South China Sea, bounded by Latitude 10° North and Longitude 120° East, covering an area of about 450,000 sq. nm.

- ▶According to Security Bureau Circular No. 2/2017 "Contingency Plan for Maritime and Aeronautical Search and Rescue (SAR) ", MRCC is responsible for coordinating the available government SAR resources to carry out maritime SAR missions as well as coordinating other vessels in the vicinity to assist in SAR missions in accordance with the provisions of the International Convention for Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS).

- ▶In 2010, MD and the Guangdong Provincial Maritime Search and Rescue Centre signed a "Maritime Search and Rescue Cooperation Arrangement between Hong Kong and Guangdong", specifying that the RCCs of Hong Kong and Guangdong Province may seek assistance from each other in conducting SAR operations.

List of vessels endorsed to be let for hire or reward uploaded to MD's website

On hot summer days, many people love renting a boat for cruising or visiting the outlying islands or countryside. To ensure safe navigation, the Marine Department (MD) reminds the public that they shall use services provided by local pleasure vessels endorsed by MD to be let for hire or carry passengers for reward.

The public may refer to the list of vessels endorsed to be let for hire or reward uploaded on the department's website (www.mardep.gov.hk/en/files/en/pub_services/LIST_CLASS_IV_LET_FOR_HIRE.pdf). MD has also generated a QR code (illustrated at left) which is shown on relevant promotion materials. Simply by scanning the QR code, members of the public can

verify if a local pleasure vessel is endorsed by MD to be let for hire or carry passengers for reward.

MD stresses that the public should not underestimate the risks posed by taking pleasure vessels that are not endorsed to be let for hire or reward because those vessels may not be covered by appropriate insurance, surveyed in accordance with the law, or maintained on board suitable and adequate life-saving and fire-fighting equipment. According to the Merchant Shipping (Local Vessels) (Certification and Licensing) Regulation, a local vessel must not be let for hire or reward unless it has the Director of Marine's endorsement and is holding a valid certificate of inspection or certificate of survey, a third party risks insurance policy, an operating licence, and a written charter agreement or written hire-purchase agreement.

In fact, in addition to daily patrols and law enforcement within Hong Kong waters, MD also works closely with the Marine Police to conduct joint operations in black spots such as Sai Kung, Tai Po, Tai O, Wong Shek Pier and Aberdeen from time to time to combat illegal activities including illegal carriage of passengers, speeding, overloading, and violation of licensing conditions and the relevant marine legislation. If a vessel is found being let for hire or carrying passengers for reward without a relevant licence or the Director of Marine's endorsement, the owner, agent and/or operator will be prosecuted.

Signing of framework agreement on co-operation in Mirs Bay pilotage between Hong Kong and Shenzhen

The Marine Department signed a framework agreement on co-operation in Mirs Bay pilotage with the Transport Bureau of the Shenzhen Municipal People's Government on 15 March 2022. A consensus has been reached in various areas of co-operation including the scope of pilotage services, deployment of pilots and charging arrangements. The agreement took effect from 1 June with a validity period of three years.

Under the principles of complementarity and mutual benefits, and in compliance with the legal requirements of both places, Hong Kong and Shenzhen have agreed upon an innovative mode of co-operation for port services. According to the framework agreement, vessels required to be under compulsory pilotage, as stipulated in the laws of both Hong Kong and Shenzhen, will be piloted by one single Hong Kong or Shenzhen qualified pilot throughout the entire voyage to or from a Shenzhen

port through Mirs Bay and the service will be charged once.

The pilotage co-operation between Hong Kong and Shenzhen will enhance ship navigation safety in Mirs Bay, bolster the efficiency of vessels passing through the Shenzhen east port area and reduce operating costs of shipping and port entities, thereby improving the business environment of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA) and further promoting the integrated development of port and pilotage services within the GBA.

Education and Careers Expo 2022 – promoting the maritime industry

The Marine Department (MD) and the Hong Kong Maritime and Port Board set up booths at the Education and Careers Expo 2022, which was held at the Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre from 21 to 24 July, to promote and enhance young people's understanding of career opportunities in the maritime industry as well as helping them to forge their professional career paths.

Representatives from several professional grades of MD, including Marine Officers, Surveyors of Ships, Assistant Marine Controllers and Marine Inspectors II, were present at the booth to introduce to visitors the entry requirements, job functions in different units as well as their respective career prospects.

Under the guidance of MD staff, visitors could try to steer by themselves a full mission ship simulator through which they could experience ship steering and also realise the importance of marine traffic safety.

To celebrate the 25th anniversary of the establishment of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR), MD distributed special souvenirs in the booth, so that young people could experience the joyful atmosphere of the anniversary while planning their career.

MD continues to go all out to fight the epidemic

In response to the fifth wave of the epidemic, the Government has made concerted efforts to fight the virus as the overriding mission. The Marine Department (MD) has also spared no effort to participate in various anti-epidemic work.

• **Support to Contact Tracing Office**

Between March and May this year, more than 20 clerical and secretarial grade colleagues of MD took up duties in the Contact Tracing Office (CTO) to provide support to infected persons through the hotline. Their duties include assisting those tested positive by Rapid Antigen Test (RAT) to report the results on the relevant online platform, referring urgent requests for assistance and answering enquiries from confirmed patients.

MD colleagues also provided email and hotline support to those infected patients who were not able to register their positive results via the online platform and to recovered persons so that they could obtain a recovery record QR code to facilitate the use of vaccine pass.

Ms. Lam Wai-ling, Clerical Officer from Fleet Operations Section, was a team leader in CTO. She was mainly responsible for administrative work as well as briefing her team members on the command team's daily work instructions and procedures. As the duties in CTO might change from time to time in accordance with the epidemic situation, she had to maintain effective communication with her team members every day so as to provide efficient and effective support to members of the public.

Ms. VY Ka-yuk, Assistant Clerical Officer of the Aberdeen Marine Office, was a vice team leader in CTO. In addition to daily administrative duties, she was also charged with responsibilities for answering public enquires and re-issuing the recovery record QR code or quarantine order to them. She said, 'Although I was always busy under a heavy schedule and sometimes found it hard to manage, all the difficulties were overcome with the support from my colleagues there. I was gratified every time I solved a problem for the public.'

Ms. Angela Chan, Assistant Clerical Officer from the Government New Construction Section, was responsible for contacting confirmed patients and handling public enquiry emails on RAT. She found the work in CTO far different from MD's. It was challenging to work in CTO as the enquiries could be handled in many different ways. Noting the tight manpower to fight the virus, she was satisfied and delighted to be part of the frontline staff to help the public.

- **Water transport of supplies**

In ensuring a stable supply of goods from the Mainland to Hong Kong, the “Sea Express” water transportation service from the Mainland to Hong Kong was launched in mid-February. MD has been actively facilitating the supply of goods from the Mainland to Hong Kong by water transport. The Cargo Handling Section of MD assisted in the delivery of goods to the Public Cargo Working Areas (PCWAs), while the Licensing and Port Formalities Section expedited the issuance of permits to cargo vessels that delivered prefabricated components for mobile cabin hospitals and community isolation facilities to smoothly enter the PCWAs within respective typhoon shelters to offload the cargoes.

MD colleagues will continue to put forth their utmost efforts to assist in the delivery of supplies by sea and to fight against the epidemic.

- **Packaging anti-epidemic service bags**

To respond to the "United in Fighting the Epidemic" campaign launched by the Government, MD mobilised 40 staff members to join hands with other colleagues from the former Transport and Housing Bureau and its subordinate departments, to participate in packaging anti-epidemic service bags at the Lohas Park Community Hall packaging center in late March this year. Motivated by the team spirit, our colleagues outperformed by completing the packaging work just in two days. The service bags were then distributed in early April.

Ms. Ayana Tang, Executive Officer from the Administration Section, was in charge of the coordination and administrative work in preparation for the packaging service. In addition to liaising with MD colleagues and arranging rosters, she also coordinated the work-flow and division of labor in the packaging center. She said it was encouraging to complete the mission successfully together with MD colleagues.

Mr. Jeff Woo, Assistant Surveyor of Ships, was one of the leaders of the packaging team. Understanding the importance of teamwork, he made every effort to ensure that his teammates could complement each other at any time so that the work could be done effectively. He said that the packaging work offered an opportunity for him to contribute to the anti-epidemic work in collaboration with colleagues he newly met.

Mr. Morgan Yeung, Assistant Surveyor of Ships, was another team leader who was responsible for packing and stocktaking the anti-epidemic materials. He described that the packaging work-flow was well organised and all colleagues spared no effort to perform the duties, hence the mission could be completed earlier than expected. He found it memorable that Mr. Frank Chan, the then Secretary for Transport and Housing; and Ms. Carol Yuen, the Director of Marine visited the center to show their support for colleagues and helped in the packaging work together with colleagues, giving full play to the esprit de corps of the entire Government to fight the virus.

Industry attachment programme for AMOs

Since 2018, the Marine Department (MD) has recruited Assistant Marine Officers (AMOs) and Assistant Surveyors of Ships (ASoSs) in order to solve the manpower shortage problem in the Marine Officer and Surveyor of Ships grades. To enable them to accumulate work experience and attain relevant professional knowledge, arrangements have been made for AMOs and ASoSs to attach to various well-known shipping entities for a 6-month industry attachment starting from January 2022. Through the industry attachment programme, they not only can learn more about maritime international and local conventions, legislation and guidelines etc., but also can gain relevant knowledge in the operations of shipping agency, chartering, insurance and ship/cargo operations and management and so on, which help them lay a solid foundation for their future professional development in MD.

Here are some sharings from the AMOs who completed their attachments in July.

Mr. Angus Wong, Assistant Marine Officer, attached to Anglo-Eastern Ship Management Limited. “During the past six months, I was assigned to six different departments that allowed me to learn the working style, division of labour and management in large-scale businesses. The most impressive part of the industry attachment was the experience working in the Quality, Health and Safety (QHS) Department. In the past, I did not know much about quality management and would only think that it was related to International Organization for Standardization (ISO) regulations. In the QHS Department, I learnt about application of those ISO regulations to both hardware and software measures, including the company’s environmental management and policies etc.

Furthermore, the company conducts an in-depth investigation into every accident

and comes up with solid solutions to all potential problems, facilitating high-quality development in the maritime industry. These really broaden my horizons!”

Mr. Ivan Lam, Assistant Marine Officer, attached to Anglo-Eastern Ship Management Limited. “I sometimes worked from home during the attachment due to the epidemic. Luckily, the company has a comprehensive online platform to make sure the work of colleagues would not be affected. Through the attachment, I acquired in-depth understanding on handling Protection and Indemnity (P&I) claims, arranging ship routes and preparing cargo towage plan etc. The industry attachment not only broadened my mind, but also updated my understanding of the maritime industry and its development.”

Mr. Mark Lau, Assistant Marine Officer, attached to Fleet Management Limited. “I had the opportunity to work in six different departments, including Business Development and Corporate Strategy Department, Technical and Operations Department and Insurance Department and so on. During the attachment, I met many maritime professionals and had more comprehensive understanding of ship management as well as the latest maritime development from business development to technical management, which benefited me a lot.”

In the coming issues of the Hong Kong Maritime News, we will continue to invite AMOs and ASoSs who have participated in the industry attachment programme to share with us their experience. Please stay tuned!

Departmental News

MD joining Ming Pao JUMP Education & Career Expo 2022

In order to attract more young people to join the maritime industry, the Marine Department (MD) participated in Ming Pao Jump Education & Career Expo 2022 held on July 16. Two Assistant Marine Officers and two Assistant Surveyor of Ships represented MD to introduce visitors to the department’s functions as well as the job duties of various professional posts. Through their sharing and explanations, young people visiting MD’s booth learnt more about the maritime industry. They were encouraged to explore job options in the marine industry and join MD in the future.

Safety Afloat Educational Seminar

In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Marine Department produced a set of promotional and publicity materials on water sports safety for distribution to the trade in lieu of the Safety Afloat Educational Seminar originally planned to be held in May this year. This set of materials includes a DVD and pamphlets featuring the Notes to Public in Hiring Class IV Pleasure Vessels and various maritime safety issues. Members of the public can also download the materials from the Department's website as follows:

https://www.mardep.gov.hk/en/publication/materials/publicity_material.html

Typhoon Shelter Cleansing Exercise

In addition to the daily marine refuse collection and scavenging services, the Marine Department (MD) conducted large-scale cleanup operations at the Aberdeen Typhoon Shelter and Shau Kei Wan Typhoon Shelter in April and May 2022 respectively, to step up efforts to keep the sea clean. At the same time, promotional leaflets were distributed by MD officers to remind the public to keep the harbour clean.

“The Great Voyage 101”

“The Great Voyage 101”, of which the production was commissioned by the Transport and Logistics Bureau, has been published. With its contents provided by Mr. Law Lap Keung, the then Chief Assistant Secretary (Transport) of the Transport and Housing Bureau, the book aims to broaden children's knowledge and understanding on sailing and navigation through interesting short stories and vivid illustrations.

To read “The Great Voyage 101”, please visit Hong Kong Reading City's website:

<https://edbookshelf.hkedcity.net/reading/ereaders/read/25382>