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LNG sector to feel crew shortages pinch as fleet expands

(Lloyds List Via Thomson Dialog NewsEdge) Failure to address the shortage of well trained seafarers for liquefied natural gas tankers will result in accidents warns an executive from Eurasia, writes Marcus Hand in Singapore .

'The shortage of staff is really beginning to hurt the industry.

'If we don't have enough trained manpower accidents will definitely occur,' Ravi Korivi, LNG consultant for Eurasia Maritime Management told a conference in Singapore.

LNG shipping has enjoyed a spotless record over the past 40 years. But, with the fleet rising nearly 50% over the next two years from 196 tankers at the moment to 308 in 2008, there will be an acute shortage of officers to crew the new ships.

At present, there are about 3,500 LNG officers worldwide and in the next five years around 2,000 additional officers will be needed.

Of the present senior officer pool, two-thirds are sourced from Western Europe and Japan.

'We should pull up our socks and find new sources of crew,' Mr Korivi told the Asia LNG Tech conference.

New sources of LNG officers could be India, the Philippines and Malaysia.

Along with the risk of accidents, should new crew not be trained up by the industry, wages for senior LNG officers are likely to rise even higher.

He said that highest level he had heard being paid for a LNG tanker master from Japan or Europe was US\$18,000 per month, while US\$13,000 to US\$14,000 was a more normal salary level.

However, as training new crew from scratch to senior officer level can take from between eight to 10 years, the only way of meeting the current shortfall is by retraining crew from other vessel types, Mr Korivi said.

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