

# Automating AMVER

**The AMVER reporting system is one of the longest-established safety systems in the marine world, but reporting is labour-intensive. Now, modern technology is making things easier**

The AMVER system was first put into place in 1958. Ships registered with the system provide a continuous update on their position, which is plotted into a central database. In the case of an emergency, an immediate register of participating vessels in the area is at hand, enabling responders to coordinate response as quickly as possible and divert the best-suited ship or ships to respond. The scheme, which is sponsored by the US Coastguard, is simple, effective, and international. "Participation is ... vital in the cooperative and humanitarian service which AMVER continues to provide selflessly to the world maritime community," said IMO Secretary General Efthimios Mitropoulos, marking the 50th anniversary of the system earlier this year.

There are currently 17,000 vessels enrolled in the AMVER network from over 150 countries. At any one time, up to 3,600 ships are "online", actively reporting and available to assist in the search and rescue of their fellow mariners. AMVER's success is tied directly to the number of merchant vessels regularly reporting their position. The more ships on their plot, the greater the chance a ship will be identified near the position of a distress.

However, despite all the improvements that modern technology can offer, it has remained manpower intensive. Submitting regular email reports, including sailing plans, daily position reports, deviation reports and final arrival reports can seem just another chore to add to an already heavy administrative burden. As a result, the number of vessels taking part in AMVER is still not as high as it could be. Thanks to an

innovation from maritime software company Pole Star, however, that could be about to change.

Pole Star, amongst other things, tracks ships for owners, operators and charterers using shipboard Inmarsat C terminals. Following a request from AMVER, Pole Star were able to design a function within their system that allows shipowners/operators to automatically send position reports into the AMVER system, at no cost to themselves or to AMVER. The reporting system is activated by ticking a box, with no need for additional hardware, equipment or software downloads.

In the past, one real obstacle to entry was not a commercial one, but came in fact from the ship's staff, on whom the burden of extra reporting fell. That obstacle has now been removed. Since the launch of the automated system in June this year, some 300 vessels, or 20% of Pole Star's managed fleet, have joined the AMVER scheme.

"The workload on shipmasters is already high, and this collaboration means the master no longer has to manually send reports to AMVER. This achieves both savings on communication costs from the vessel and relieves that administrative burden from the master. Furthermore, the more vessels reporting to AMVER, the higher the concentration of vessels available to respond resulting in safer shipping," said Captain Christopher Hall, United States Coast Guard Chief of Search and Rescue.

According to Julie Lithgow, head of marketing and communications at Pole Star: "The last great technological advance for AMVER was the ability to receive e-mails and input these directly into

their system. This is the next step, by making AMVER reporting automated. We believe firmly in AMVER, and we have tried to remove any barriers to reporting from shipping companies. This not only increases participation to the AMVER programme but I see a real and tangible benefit by taking the burden off the bridge team to make the reports – at a time when our bridge teams are drowning in a sea of paperwork."

Lithgow continues: "Pole Star has developed this service, in cooperation with AMVER but at no cost. We see this partnership as part of our obligation, as a member of the maritime industry, to work together using the skills and expertise we have towards safer shipping. All companies within the maritime sector have a corporate social responsibility towards our industry and our seafarers, irrespective of whether we work directly in the operations of vessels or, like us, as a service provider."