

Sharp rise in casualties in chemical and LPG sectors

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Industry-wide safety problems have spread to chemical tankers and gas carriers with a sharp rise in casualties last year.

The 42% increase in the number of incidents such as collisions, groundings and machinery failures is described as “acute and alarming” by the European chemical industry’s transport-safety body.

The Chemical Distribution Institute (CDI) recorded 152 casualties among chemical tankers and liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) carriers last year, as compared with 107 in 2006 and 99 in 2005. The rise is almost double the 22% increase in incidents involving all tankers noted by Intertanko.

CDI general manager Martin Whittle tells TradeWinds that the chemical and LPG sectors are suffering from the same problem of crew competence afflicting shipping in general. But he says chemical players will not wait on industry-wide solutions and will step up inspections. CDI members include manufacturers such as BASF Group and Dow Chemical Co and oil majors, as well as marine insurers Gard and the Norwegian Hull Club.

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WORSENING SAFETY RECORD: Pipework on board an LPG carrier

Photo: Gillian Whittaker

The biggest rises last year were in collisions and machinery failures — a pattern the CDI has also witnessed among containerships, which through their carriage of packaged chemicals come under its vetting programme.

The industry was rocked by a series of deadly blasts on chemical tankers four years ago, which prompted the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) to consider making nitrogen-based in-

ert-gas systems mandatory for both new and existing ships.

But rather than wait for the IMO, charterers and owners moved quickly to tighten up procedures, while more cargoes were carried using inert gas. Whittle says no explosions or serious fires have occurred since. The number of deaths among crews has also fallen with only two “operational” fatalities recorded last year, as compared with 28 in 2004.