

# When the going gets tough cruisers get tags

Monitoring people during the evacuation of a cruise ship is one of the most vital roles to be carried out, not least when cruise ships sizes are on the increase and the number of people onboard could be of the order of 8000. Sandra Speares reports.

**T**agging passengers and crew on cruise ships is evidently an important means of ensuring passengers make it to the muster station when a ship needs to be abandoned and those with physical disabilities or reduced mobility are cared for.

Research on reactions to traumatic events on passenger ships has suggested that there may be, aside from those who are physically prevented from acting quickly, people aboard who simply freeze and are incapable of helping themselves.

In these circumstances, being able to monitor their movements, or if they arrive at the muster station, is going to be vitally important.

While cruise lines like Royal Caribbean have been introducing innovative communications links to ensure direct contact between the captain and crew and passengers in the event of an evacuation, tagging passengers is one effective way of locating them when a crisis occurs, or indeed on family cruise ships when

parents are keen to keep an eye on their children while they move round the ship.

Tagging passengers in more general terms remains a matter for some debate. What happens, for example, if the passenger is located in the wrong cabin at the wrong time? With recent moves in the USA to ensure that it is impossible for a cruise passenger to fall overboard without instantly being detected tagging or other technology may be the way forward.

Some cruise companies have been reluctant to acknowledge, at least to journalists, that an evacuation at sea might have to take place at all and others that ships will always be in the vicinity to assist in the evacuation. In the case of the 1991 evacuation of *Oceanos*, it was only the courage of South African helicopter pilots, plus the proximity of the coastline which prevented a disaster.

According to Captain Trevor Bailey, managing director of Seatag he was teaching about crisis management and



Captain Trevor Bailey said that a primary concern in any emergency is whether there is sufficient information on passengers aboard the vessel.



crowd management and began wonder about how individuals were going to deal with the situation. "One of my immediate concerns would be information and whether I have all the information I need about people onboard," he says. In considering the problem he decided there must be an easier way than running round with a chipboard or people reading out names which they might not understand or be able to pronounce.

Seatag's product is under consideration by a number of cruise companies and Captain Bailey says he has had "great support" from the US Coast Guard (USCG). In 2009 the USCG, Ketchikan Fire Department,

Mustering passengers during a trial of the system aboard a cruise vessel.

Holland America Line and US Customs and Border Control along with Seatag organised a joint exercise to demonstrate their product.

What the US authorities were interested to see was if the technology could be used to locate people after they had abandoned ship, Captain Bailey explains. The company came up with their landfall product by which if technology was taken ashore when the vessel was abandoned, so the company developed the go box which means you can take the box ashore and still have the means to track people.

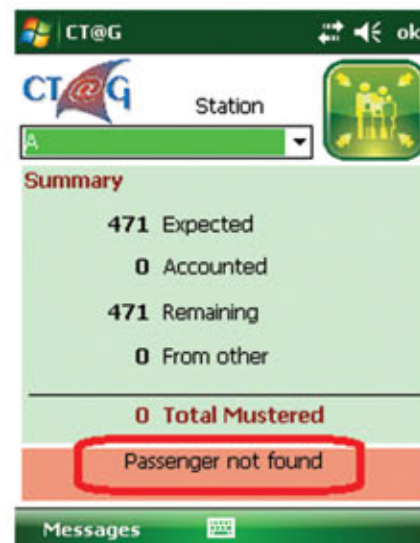
Part of the method at the cruise mustering station is to scan the passengers' cruise card and use the information. This will provide information on who they are, if they do not have the card, the functions

are still there to establish their identity and details.

Assuming there is a wireless network on board the ship while the network exists, each of the PDAs will continue talking to the server.

The technology is not only aimed for use in cruise ship situations but in any situation where personnel need to be accounted for quickly, as in shipyard emergencies. In the case of cruise ships, disabilities or mobility issues are listed as are personal details.

So do the cruise companies accept that they are one accident away from more regulation? The aim, as far as Captain Bailey is concerned is to have systems in place to comply with any regulation before it happens. *NA*



A screenshot from the Seatag identification system.