



Press information

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For immediate release

IIMS President raises concerns about the growing tick box culture of marine survey reporting

Tick box marine survey reporting is becoming far more common than it used to be. That is the view of Peter Broad, President of the International Institute of Marine Surveying (IIMS). But are tick box marine survey reports fit for purpose, or are they lazy reporting?

Advantages and limitations

Advantages:

1. **Standardisation:** They provide a standardised framework for conducting inspections, ensuring that essential aspects of a vessel are systematically checked. This helps in maintaining consistency across different surveys and facilitates easy comparison between vessels or inspections.
2. **Efficiency:** Tick box survey reports streamline the inspection process, allowing surveyors to cover a wide range of components and systems efficiently. This structured approach can save time during the survey.
3. **Clarity and Communication:** The reports offer a clear and concise method of communication between surveyors, vessel owners, operators, and regulatory bodies. The use of tick boxes can help in quickly conveying the status or condition of various elements.

Limitations:

1. **Lack of Nuance:** While tick box reports cover a broad range of items, they might not capture all nuances or specific details about a ship or boat's condition. Some aspects may require more qualitative and quantitative assessments beyond a tick box.
2. **Subjectivity:** Interpretation of tick box options (e.g., 'Satisfactory,' 'Requires Attention') might differ between surveyors, leading to subjective assessments. This subjectivity can sometimes limit the accuracy of the report.
3. **Comprehensive Understanding:** Relying solely on tick boxes might not provide sufficient information about the vessel's condition that requires attention but isn't part of the standard checklist.

In essence, a tick box marine survey checklist can be useful as a structured framework to guide inspections and perhaps less experienced surveyors to help ensure comprehensive coverage. However, they should be used to complement a surveyor's expertise and experience, not replace it.

Peter Broad said, "I draw a clear distinction between an 'Inspection' and a 'Survey.' I would suggest that the level of training and experience to carry out a marine survey by a qualified surveyor is higher than that of an inspection carried out by an inspector. A tick box form may be useful for an inspection by a less qualified and less experienced person to gather information quickly on the status of a system where a 'Yes' or 'No' answer can be given without any further explanation."

The marine survey report is ultimately the surveyor's output and his/her responsibility to the instructing party. The effectiveness of a tick box survey template depends on the surveyor's ability to use them judiciously, combining the tick box assessments with clear and concise written textual evaluations and expert judgment.

Again, from Peter Broad, "The effectiveness of a tick box survey report depends on how it is used and the context in which it is applied to ascertain if it is fit for purpose."

IIMS Chief Executive Officer, Mike Schwarz, added "A survey report should give the instructing client a clear and detailed overview of what has been surveyed with a list of any defects and recommendations that have been found. A tick box survey does not necessarily meet that requirement and can leave the instructing client lacking in essential information. IIMS sees a number of tick box survey reports that are not fit for purpose."

Here's an example:

Does the vessel have a bilge pump? YES/NO

This tick in the box does alone not provide an explanation as to whether the bilge pump works, if the piping system is in good condition, if it has an oily water separator and if the oily water separator is certified and in working condition. Are the bilges clean and free from oil contamination? Are there any rags in the bilges?

Obviously, one tick box about the bilge pump is not sufficient to provide a full description based on the attending surveyor's observations and his/her understanding of the importance of the bilge pump from a ship safety aspect and the expectations of MARPOL.

Ultimately, a professional marine surveyor must remember that their survey reports are admissible as court documents if there is a legal case. Imagine if a vessel sinks and there is loss of life, and the subsequent marine accident investigation finds that the bilge pump was not working properly. The last attending surveyor on that vessel who ticked the box only for the bilge pump and made no further comment could be potentially looking at a charge of gross negligence, or even worse.

Ends.

Note to editors

Peter Broad is President of The International Institute of Marine Surveying and CEO of Broadreach Marine, Technical Consultants and Marine Surveyors. Web: <https://broadreachmarine.com>

About IIMS

Formed in 1991, the International Institute of Marine Surveying is a not-for-profit organisation and the leading worldwide professional body for marine surveyors with a membership of one thousand surveyors in over one hundred countries.

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