

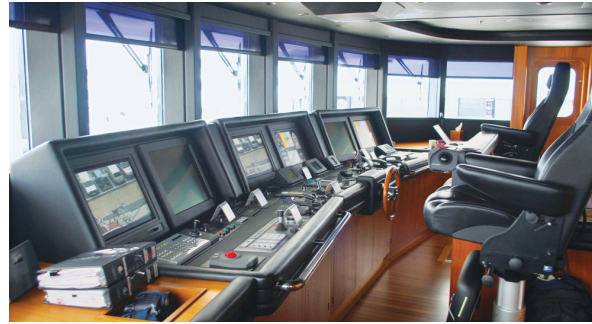
Ensuring the safe application of ecdis

“The safe and correct operation of the ecdis is vital,” says **Steve Monk** of Da Gama Navigation, an independent company of master mariners with a wealth of experience in advising vessels on which equipment they should fit, providing crew training and assisting in the development of risk assessments

Dates are drawing ever nearer for the compulsory implementation of ecdis with manufacturers devising new ways of making their equipment more attractive to the user, procurement managers becoming confused by the choices available and bridge watchkeepers endeavouring to make sense of the regulations and training requirements.

Although IMO will tell you the dates for the fitting of ecdis have been known for long enough, we’re only just beginning to witness the rush to meet compliance. With this comes a steady rise in the number of training centres but with clear evidence of a distinct variation in standards with some providers claiming to be able to squeeze the official 40 hour five day IMO course model into just two or three days. Practical experience and knowledge would recommend candidates look very carefully at exactly what’s been offered and don’t just choose the shortest course, as it’s likely to be the weakest.

Many believe that with a continual GPS feed, the position of the ship as shown on the electronic chart must be correct and therefore the vessel must be safe. However, all too often accident reports indicate an over-reliance on, or a failure to correctly set up the ecdis as contributing to the cause of an incident during which the bridge team had no reason to doubt they were in danger. If nothing else, operators should remember the ecdis is only an aid to navigation.



Ecdis system information should be backed up by visual references

Additionally, the ever increasing number of computer screens now bombarding the OOW with a wealth of information means the bridge team forget or don’t have time to do the one thing that’s likely to keep them safe – look out of the window. Da Gama is not against advances in technology and the use of ecdis, however it strongly suggests bridge teams remember the fundamentals of navigation and always question the accuracy of the ecdis by effectively trying to prove you’re not where the computer says you are. Using visual references will always help.

As mentioned, a risk assessment has to be completed and submitted to flag state for approval to navigate primarily by electronic means and to that end every watchkeeper should be fully conversant with its content. They should regularly fix the ship’s position by alternative means including visual or radar to demonstrate knowledge of the ecdis fallback modes and in line with most company policy, are advised to be tested annually in the safe and correct operation of the equipment by the means of external evaluators.

To assist in the development of constructive feedback in the use of ecdis Da Gama requests any equipment, training or general comments are left at www.ecdisrevolution.org to help promote the safety of your fellow professional mariner. **ECDIS**