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An ISO Standards New Year's Resolution:

Captain Katherine Sweeney (from MarineNews December 2011 edition)   Friday, January 06, 2012

Objectives & Targets add up to "Saying What You Mean, Meaning what You Say and then, Proving it."

Captain Katherine Sweeney

As a maritime compliance auditor in the field, I'm often called upon to explain the ISO's (International Standards Organization) approach to continual improvement which says a company shall establish, implement and maintain documented objectives and targets at each relevant function and level within the organization. This is only a requirement of the ISO's "E" or environmental standard. To get to the "E" or ISO 14001 certification you must first list all the aspects of your business and how each impacts the environment.

It is only logical (and a requirement of the Standard) that after you've identified it, you've got to work on it. This leads to an excellent New Year's resolution: objectives and targets. The folks at the ISO are pretty smart. They must have gone to weight watchers or something, because not only must you have a good intention, you must write it down, keep track of it, designate responsibility for achieving the target and designate a time frame in which you will achieve it.

Luckily, there is no counselor involved, but there is the weigh-in, meaning you should be able to measure progress toward the target. You must also report back how well you are doing to the interested parties (and by this I mean the employees).

Why should you bother yourself with all this time-consuming documentation? For one thing it communicates to your employees that you're involved in the process and that you've got some skin in the game by naming who is responsible. Publically stepping on the scale and getting back to your employees with the results communicates the benefit and effectiveness of the change the company is making. If you're successful in meeting the target, then this will also be apparent to your crew. If you're not successful, it allows your employees to see you fail in the public arena which shows you are human and willing to attempt a change, even if doesn't work. Never underestimate a little self-deprecating humor. A little goes a long way.

There is no requirement to have the targets in the ISM (International Safety Management) Code. The OHSAS (Occupational Health and Safety Assessment Series) 18001:2007 Standard, called the "H" or Health Standard, requires much the same as the "E" Standard. While it doesn't specifically use the word "targets," the standard does call for establishing, implementing and maintaining a program for achieving the objectives. The "H" Standard calls for a minimum of designating the responsibility, authority and means for achieving the objectives, as well as the time frame by which the objectives are to be achieved. You are also required to review your progress at regular and planned intervals and make adjustments as necessary.

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The ABS (American Bureau of Shipping) has put out a guide aptly named ABS Guide for Marine Health, Safety, Quality, and Environmental Management (a free 48 page pdf download from their web site) which combines all of the standards into one source and gives it a maritime bent. The guide indicates which requirement is appropriate to which standard. There is a cross reference matrix in the back of the guide listing the number of each requirement to its equivalent (if an equivalent exists) in the actual ISM Code or ISO Standard (H, Q, or E).

The ISM Code and the ISO standards have a great deal to do with continually improving the management system of your company. A New Year's resolution to actively engage in making improvements to your company's management system is a worthwhile endeavor, whether or not your company is, or aspires to be, H, S, Q, or E Certified. In other words, "Say what you mean, mean what you say, and prove it."

Footnotes: ISO 14001:2004 4.3.3 /   OHSHSAS 18001:2007 4.3.3

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