

Certification - a Sales Driver?

In my editorial in the March issue of Hydro International, I mentioned the inconsistency in certification of ship equipment in particular for ECDIS, where both the hardware and software have to conform to specifications and be certified/approved, and the charts have to be 'official' (i.e. ENC's), whereas the 'shore-based' supply chain of digital hydrographic data receives less attention, for example, the license administration of a chart supplier and the computer system of a chart agent. Regarding this shore-based aspect, luckily more and more HO's have ISO certification for their production chain, from data collection to the end-product.

While preparing for this issue (with the theme remote sensing), I came across a question from a manufacturer working on a value-added service (geo-referenced data, based on remote sensing, of relevance for safe navigation) for electronic charts: "How can I have my product certified?" The reason was a commercial one: he wanted to use certification as a sales argument. However, the question is relevant: if nautical chart data should be 'official', why are regulations for other data – such as weather, ice, tidal data or data from pilots, which are also of importance to safe navigation – missing. Some might argue from another perspective: why can't 'privately manufactured' chart data be used as well if the 'production process' passes a certification procedure. The question of quality assurance of, amongst others, these above-mentioned data is of the same relevance to, for example, the oil and gas industry, which operates for the greater part outside the IMO-SOLAS regime. For your information, not knowing from quick recollection an organisation able and willing to certify the manufacturer's product, I could not provide him with a firm answer.

Remote sensing enables us to measure many different parameters, such as chlorophyll, sea surface temperature, wind speed and direction, water depth, current, etc. Few technologies have made such a fundamental change to the collection of data as has remote sensing. Until fairly recently, observations were made while we 'happened to be there'. Our knowledge and explanation of phenomena and models were based on these 'incidental observations'. Nowadays, remote sensing allows us the possibility of 'continuous' observations, at individual locations and over large areas, and over longer periods of time. The volumes of data have greatly increased our knowledge of oceans, coastal zones and weather, thanks to the new remote sensing capabilities. These vast volumes of data make data management and presentation techniques of even greater importance.

Remote sensing capabilities are enhancing the operational capacity of oceanographic and hydrographic ships, so just imagine the possibilities if the same progress of the last 20 years is made in the coming 20 years. These remote sensing capabilities might (and probably will) have a tendency to reduce numbers of ships, which may be considered too expensive to operate. Surveyors and oceanographers will find themselves spending more time ashore than in their present traditional environment: out at sea. So enjoy your time as a field surveyor while you still can!

However, nothing is for sure, as the process of reducing time at sea may be countered by new questions raised (for example, by new data or new methods of data collection).

Enjoy your read!