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A Message from our Group CEO on Business Continuity Planning

By Olav Nortun, Chief Executive Officer, Thome Group

Dear Maritime Colleagues,

We are all experiencing a huge change in both our personal and professional lives due to the changes brought about by the global COVID-19 pandemic.

At the time of writing, something like a fifth of the world’s population is under some form of lockdown, designed to restrict our social interaction to halt the rate of infection of this highly contagious virus.

This is having a major impact on global trade and the way in which we do business.

During these uncertain times it is vital to have a plan to address the various implications which the virus has imposed on us and so in this issue most of the articles refer to our comprehensive Business Continuity Plan (BCP) and how we are implementing it so we can operate as efficiently as possible, working within any limitations set by governments, port authorities, health organizations or regulatory bodies.

I would like to congratulate all staff for their flexibility in these changing times, to our office teams who are now working from home and to our seafarers, some of whom are enduring a longer than scheduled period at sea due to the various travel restrictions around globe, making crew changeovers almost impossible.

Your patience, fortitude and loyalty are admirable and the Thome Group is doing everything it can to support its seafarers and their families in what is a very stressful situation for all concerned. For instance Thome has extended its hotline services in collaboration with ISWAN which is providing a team of specially trained psychologists who are experienced in dealing with stressful onboard issues.

To keep the crew occupied and take their minds off the crisis, we’ve arranged a different kind of weekly activity with rewards at the end of it, such as art competitions, best group singing sessions, photo competitions, best effort in maintaining COVID-19 preparedness, or best workout session. We would like to reach out to the seafarers and keep them engaged during this difficult time.

As part of our BCP and to help deal with the ongoing changing situation, an emergency response management team has been created which meets on a daily basis to address COVID-19 related issues and respond to any concerns from clients, owners or crews.

We were well prepared. The implementation of the plan, including adaptions made have proved we are very adaptable and resilient.

One thing is certain - we will get through this and we will emerge from the crisis stronger than ever.

Stay safe.
Overview on the Business Continuity Plan

By Claes Eek Thorstensen, President and CCO Thome Group

Managing and mitigating risk is a daily challenge for any business. At the Thome Group, we are very experienced in ensuring that all our operations and processes, whether in the office or at sea, have been properly thought out and meticulously planned in advance to take into account different scenarios.

However, we are now living in unprecedented times where the global coronavirus pandemic is having a major impact on every aspect of our business and personal lives.

I am pleased to report that as infection rates began to spread around the globe, we were one of the first maritime companies to take decisive action by implementing our Business Continuity Plan (BCP) so that the Group could continue to function within the limitations set by various countries around the world.

Our IT department ensured that all our office staff had the right equipment and network access so they could work efficiently at home.

Extra Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) was sent to our vessels so that our seafarers could protect themselves against infection and various protocols were put in place to e.g. check individual crew members’ temperatures twice daily, maintain social distancing where possible and also how to implement health checks on third-party personnel before allowing them to onboard, to minimise the risk to crew’s health.

An internal pandemic committee has also been setup to address the various challenges of this dynamically changing situation with regards to the different and changing restrictions being implemented at ports, varying travel restrictions in countries around the globe, which affect crew changeovers, and keeping our seafarers’ families up to date with the latest news about their loved ones via our crewing agents.

Against this backdrop, I am pleased to report that we were able to make some crew changeovers and are working with other industry partners to get world governments to recognise crew as key workers so that they can travel unhindered to facilitate global supply chain continuity which is so vital to the world economy.

We have also managed to take over some new vessels during this pandemic and I would like to congratulate the crews that have worked tirelessly to get these vessels properly prepared in time for their official launches with sea trials and audits to confirm compliance to all the required regulations.

Without a comprehensive BCP in place none of this would have been possible and so I would like to thank each and every one of you, whether ashore or at sea, for adapting to these changes and for your continued support in maintaining our business continuity during this period of uncertainty.
Business Continuity Planning

By Jamie Morgan Ramsamy, Quality Assurance Manager

Managing risks and processes to ensure safe and reliable operations is a daily activity at Thome. Risks are identified and controls are embedded within our procedures to ensure that we safeguard our personnel, the environment, and our client’s interests at large. However, an organisation needs to also plan to address threats that are larger in scope even though their likelihoods are less than our day to day operations. Failing to do so will not only disrupt the delivery of our services but can also potentially cripple the organisation.

The ability for an organisation to efficiently and effectively bounce back after a low occurring highly impactful event is a measure of its resilience and this is where business continuity planning is vital. Planning of this nature is a sub-set of risk management and therefore follows a similar methodology.

Whilst low occurring and highly impactful events can be extensive, the reality is that Thome’s BCP, after extensive research and analysis, addresses those events which are most likely to severely disrupt our global operation based on historical and empirical evidence. The journey towards developing and implementing a robust BCP required us to scrutinise our operations more closely than ever before and the coordinated effort across all levels of the organisation ultimately led to a response plan that can manage our biggest organisational risks.

A business impact analysis allowed us to prioritise and divert resources to critical business functions. Unlike other organisations, shipping is an essential industry and is the backbone of the global supply chain. Therefore, it was insufficient for us to rely upon a delay recovery period of critical business functions. Instead, we set the ambitious target of zero-delayed recovery and planned all response actions around this vision.

All scenarios, which we had identified that could potentially cripple the organisation, showed us that there was a critical need to have a robust, resilient and intelligently designed IT infrastructure system which would allow our employees both ashore and onboard our managed vessels, to seamlessly make a transition in the event of a major disaster. Since Thome had already embarked on its journey towards digitalisation, there was a synergy that allowed us to collaborate and execute actions in a manner that did not subvert other long term goals and objectives.

Planning for the IT infrastructure and reviewing our internal business processes helped us identify areas where digitalised execution of tasks was not necessarily possible in some areas. This lead to the development of “manual-mode” transition strategies to be developed to meet interim needs. Manual-mode processes were additionally reviewed to determine the viability of developing methods to migrate them to more a digitalised approach.

It is as equally important to recognise the need to have a centralised response team coordinating all efforts in addressing the threat, managing response and establishing a path towards recovery. Therefore, a crisis management team was created with dedicated roles and responsibilities. Upon activation of the plan, this team would be the centralised response unit to assess the nature of the event, develop stakeholder action plans, assess and control information flow and continually manage the threat.

The planning and coordination that lead to the creation of our BCP, ultimately saw us activating our pandemic response plan during initial outbreak of COVID-19. Whilst the virus has had an impact that is larger than anything seen in recent memory, the development of systems, processes, tools, and actions, helped us to see minimal disruptions in our services.

Whilst this global pandemic continues, we at Thome are learning from this current situation so that we can further enhance our response. A BCP is never set in stone and it requires review, testing and incorporating lessons learned. We must be prepared for all possible scenarios and therefore, this will allow us to navigate through and adapt to future challenges.
Business Continuity Planning Means We are Prepared

By *Madelyn Tan*, Assistant HSSEQ Manager

Business continuity planning has assumed a high priority since the beginning of this decade, which began with the unforgettable 9/11 incident claiming almost 3,000 lives. Since then, we have seen many terrorist attacks as well as natural disasters happening around the world. It is therefore imperative for businesses to plan for resilience.

Sourcing for personal protective equipment (PPE) during the COVID-19 pandemic proved to be a challenge. The main factors that contribute to this challenge was over demand and shortage of supplies worldwide. There was an over demand because no corporation or country in the world was prepared for this pandemic and no manufacturer was prepared for this surge of demand for PPE.

With experience from previous novel acute respiratory infections with pandemic potential (e.g. influenza and SARS) in Singapore, Thome’s head office have maintained a steady stock of PPE. These PPE included surgical gloves, cleaning and disinfectant liquids, surgical masks, N95 masks, safety goggles and thermometers. These items are periodically checked for their expiry and quality to ensure the items are fit for use.

Alcohol sanitisers, were however, not part of Thome’s inventory list. The reason for omitting alcohol sanitisers was simply due to its high flammability. Safety is always our number one consideration in the organisation.

To protect our ships and crew from the pandemic, HSSEQ circular 23/2020 on how to maintain personal hygiene, best practices on how to stay healthy and how to correctly use/put on PPE was sent onboard. We have also aided vessels that were unable to obtain the necessary PPE during their Singapore call and through our procurement and supply chain, we secured PPE to supply to the rest of the fleet.

To maintain the mental health and morale of our seafarers during these difficult times, to encourage and cheer them on, our Corporate Communications department launched various posters and campaigns on social media.

If we refer to the hierarchy of controls (mitigation measures) in risk management, PPE is the lowest level of control. As such, we encourage our crew and staff to take active control measures such as maintaining their personal hygiene by washing hands frequently and practice social distancing.

Embracing a Digital Future

By *Capt. Anurag Dawar*, Senior Superintendent, Marine & Safety

The COVID-19 pandemic has posed unprecedented challenges to society at large and the marine industry, a key contributor to the global supply chain, is not immune to its effects.

In the current scenario, despite our best efforts, due to the numerous travel restrictions and the ever-changing nature of local, regional and national enforcement measures, the planning of executing internal audits had become extremely complex.

True to our resilient nature, our inhouse team of safety and compliance experts in collaboration with the IT team, developed the remote internal audit process to not only ensure compliance to ISM Ch 12.1 requirements but also to ensure that the verification of the implementation of the management systems onboard managed vessels continued without any disruptions, despite the COVID-19 restrictions.

Each vessel’s connectivity issues and unique challenges (given technology onboard, global location, etc.) were considered. A mix of teleconferencing, screen sharing of documents, live crew interviews and evidence generation were used for the successful conduct of the first remote audit in Apr 2020. The success of the remote audit process has resulted in it being rolled out fleet wide.

The new normal will look unlike any in the years preceding the pandemic. A shock of this scale will create a paradigm shift in the preferences and expectations of stakeholders and businesses. These shifts and their impact on how we work, and how we use technology will emerge more clearly over the coming weeks and months. Thome is ready to embrace the digital future!
Travel restrictions imposed by various nations across the world have significantly affected seafarers. Statistics reveal that a rising number of seafarers have completed their contracts and are waiting to sign off from vessels or are stuck in a foreign port awaiting homebound flights.

At Thome, we are still facing challenges similar to those faced by the other ship managers in the industry. When the COVID-19 epidemic started, we were amongst one of the first ship managers to initiate and implement a Business Continuity plan (BCP) in the early periods of the outbreak for the shore team. At the same time, we introduced a pandemic committee to address the various challenges in implementing the BCP for our vessels.

We initiated some crew changes, wherever it was possible, up until 11th Mar 2020. On 11th Mar 2020, the World Health Organisation (WHO) declared COVID-19 as a pandemic disease, resulting in a rapid amendment of immigration rules in most of the affected countries, which subsequently disrupted ongoing crew changes. These last minute changes to immigration laws forbade crew members on some vessels from signing off even though their relievers were onboard.

We also have crew from a vessel waiting in a hotel to travel back to India and the Philippines, after the vessel was re-delivered. The highly fluid nature of these immigration rule alterations led the Thome Group to suspend crew changes for 4 weeks from 15th Mar 2020 and the fleet was duly informed.

The safety of the crew is of utmost importance for the Thome Group and clear guidelines were provided to the vessels on how to prevent COVID-19 while calling at port or while allowing visitors onboard. Weekly updates on the COVID situation and guidelines were provided to the fleet, along with supplies of the required PPE and other necessary items.

Vessel managers and crewing operation personnel are in regular contact with the vessels, monitoring the wellbeing of the crew as well as the stock of PPE onboard.

Our seafarers have been very understanding and cooperative, despite the emotions and frustrations they are going through, especially the ones unable to go home after finishing their contract whose families need their physical support. We sincerely acknowledge and appreciate their cooperation during these challenging times.

Thome has initiated measures to support the seafarers by implementing a seafarer’s mental health support helpline with ISWAN (International Seafarers Welfare and Assistance Network). We are also working closely with vessel owners to increase the free wi-fi and telephone services for seafarers, assisting them to frequently connect their loved ones ashore.

Thome, through our worldwide manning offices, has reached out to the families of all the crew who were unable to sign off and offered them the required assistance and support. We also thank the family members of all our seafarers who have been very understanding and supportive despite their personal difficulties.

At present, Thome is working with the others in the industry to get the seafarers declared as “Essential Service Personnel” by all countries, which will enable them to travel worldwide. As more and more countries are accepting this, we hope that we shall be able to resume the crew changes without further delay.

Thome Group management appreciates and would like to thank all our seafarers for their cooperation, understanding and patience during these challenging times. We request all our seafarers worldwide to be vigilant and continue practices of hand washing, social distancing and wearing masks when necessary to safeguard themselves from COVID-19.
Risks and threats are normal in any business within different industries, therefore preparation and mitigation planning is as important as the focus on daily operational efficiency. The recent threat of COVID-19 is the epitome of such threats that have challenged all businesses to rapidly find alternatives of continuing business operations with minimal disruptions and most importantly while ensuring the safety of their employees.

However, what makes great companies stand out from their competitors is their ability to use a well-developed contingency plans and bounce back or continue operations with minimal negative impacts from unfavorable circumstances: whether it is supply chain interruption, loss of network resource, unstable communications, or loss of staff mobility etc.

It is in the best interests of the business if the entire workforce and the management team is aware of the positive contributions they can make, should the business be disrupted. Going back to normal business operations can be a tedious process, but a well-guided and organized environment can help all procedures be implemented smoothly and efficiently. A great business continuity plan can help maximize the usage of resources.

The way that we use our resources during business continuity procedures is one of the factors that can contribute to the success of the process. Hence, it is essential that we ensure that all the elements that we work with are properly used and appropriately interlinked with one another. As such the integral factor in building the IT Contingency plan, as part of the BCP, is the innovative and
optimized usage of technology in IT facilities and tools, and very importantly their deployment in a timely manner. In view of the COVID 19 pandemic, most businesses had to close their offices and employees are now working from home, to avoid the spread of the virus. The objectives of the IT Contingency plan was therefore to ensure business operational continuity with minimal disruptions and delay.

In the IT Contingency planning, the major factors considered were:
- Deployment of mobile equipment e.g. laptops and mobile phones for remote access.
- Enabling the transfer of calls from office to local or personal phones using VOIP (3CX Cloud VOIP) at minimal usage costs.
- Enabling the ‘blasting’ of urgent messages from the company to all staff mobiles (in case of any delayed access to emails).
- Ensuring good and stable communication lines between the offices in various countries, to support the data flow and voice communications. For some countries however, the local loop faced challenges as some of the local vicinities did not have good internet connections.
- Enhanced secured access to applications via VPN (Cato) for speed and stable connections.
- Help with online meeting set-ups using MS Teams or Bluejeans to continue regular visual/voice contacts internally as well as with external business associates.
- Use of backup on cloud (One Drive) enabling employees to maintain their regular backups online as well as ease of accessing of files from any location. - The communication plan keeps everyone updated on the actual steps of the usage procedures, action plan implementation, and overall business continuity workflow.
- Last but not least, the IT operations continue to push anti-virus updates to the local machines to ensure a continued secured environment for all.

Even with the best laid plans, it is the cooperation, discipline and teamwork of the company that ensured its successful implementation, resulting in the continued smooth and optimized operational flow.
THOME WORLD

Thome Group’s Successful Remote Audits with DNV GL

By TGN Editorial Team

The Thome Group has successfully undergone a series of remote audits with DNV GL in various locations due to the widespread lockdown restrictions across the globe.

Thome Mumbai office’s annual ISO 9001:2015 audit was performed online using video conferencing software which enabled document sharing and discussions to take place to check that all requirements had been met. Congratulations to Arun Mehta as the first person in Thome’s history to organise a successful remote audit.

So, when the annual Document of Compliance (DOC) audits were due for Thome Ship Management, Thome Shipping and Thome Offshore Management, the remote option was the obvious choice. DNV GL coordinated the audits with relevant Thome personnel in each of the companies and the Hong Kong, Liberia and Marshall Islands Flags also had representatives present to remotely witness that the surveys were carried out to their satisfaction. This is currently the largest remote annual DOC audit performed by DNVGL Singapore.

Congratulations to Madelyn Tan who singlehandedly planned and executed both Thome Ship Management and Thome Shipping’s DOC remote audits with all personnel from DNVGL and 7 flag states.

Agency Portal Launched By Thome Ship Agency

By Genny Yeo, Program Management Office (PMO) Manager

With the expansion of Thome Ship Agency’s business and Agency Hub Operations, we launched our very own Thome Agency Portal in February 2020 to better manage the growing volume of requests and streamline the work processes for enhanced efficiency, cost savings, control and integration with other systems. The Thome Agency Portal supports the end-to-end operational process from requests to agent nomination to final disbursement account preparation.

The Thome Agency Portal is being rolled out in a phased approach starting with our in-house agents and core system features, which are also accessible on mobile devices, before we fully launch to our external agents and third-party providers.

With the continuous process improvement and collective feedback from the business teams, we are looking forward to more enhancements and new features which are in the pipeline this year. This includes a hub operations dashboard and reporting functions; along with an improved user experience. We strive to adopt technology as part of our business strategy.
Shore Staff Preparations for COVID-19

By Cheryl Kok, HR Manager

Businesses across the globe are facing an unprecedented state of change and uncertainty as they work to address the challenges presented by the COVID-19 outbreak. In times like this, it is imperative that we act fast and reduce risks faced by our people, our operations, and our business.

I. Safety of our people
Our people are our most valuable asset which is why, in the initial stage, we recognized that all employees should have a thermometer to measure and monitor their own health and raise out any abnormality in temperature.

We also implemented a screening questionnaire for all visitors to our offices including temperature checks. In addition, to help reduce the volume of visitors to our office, we advised our employees to use video conferencing and avoid face-to-face communication as much as possible.

We also enforced safe distancing measures and staggered hours in our Singapore office to minimize staff numbers and reduce a potential infection spread.

II. Continuity of business
Eventually as various countries’ governments imposed lockdowns, tightened border controls and restricted movement, we had to ensure continuity of our business by moving towards working at home. The challenge then was to ensure that every single one of our employees had a laptop to work from home with a stable internet connection so that productivity could be maintained. Our IT team provided tremendous support during this period in the procurement of equipment for everyone and the setting-up of various systems and applications.

People in key functions can return to the office for essential matters to ensure our business is running as usual.

III. Communication challenge
As with all project implementation and roll-out, the real challenge is on the communication front, in making sure our people understand the reasons for such measures and abiding by them. With the help of our departmental heads and line managers, we managed to get our message across and have full compliance from employees and are extremely fortunate that our employees have been so understanding on the implemented measures.

Even now as we continue to fight the pandemic while living on this new normal, we need to be resilient and ride out the crisis together to emerge stronger than before. Only then will we be ready to embark on the next upward wave as a Thome family.
Thome Group Wins Dry Bulk Operator Award

By Giesel Salon, Corporate Communications and Marketing Executive

The Thome Group is delighted to announce that it has won the Green4Sea Dry Bulk Operator Award, which was announced during a ceremony at the Yacht Club of Greece on 3rd March 2020.

The win recognises Thome Group as a “ship operator of bulk carriers that demonstrated environmental excellence and performance.”

The Thome Group was up against a shortlist of four other prestigious companies operating in the dry bulk category and the final decision was based on an online vote where people can choose the bulk operator which they think demonstrated an outstanding environmental consideration.

Due to travel restrictions, Thome representatives were not able to attend the awarding ceremony. SQE Marine’s Client Service Manager, Aggeliki Theodosiou presented the award to Sarah Zitouni, Business Development Manager, from Lean Marine who accepts the award on behalf of the Thome Group.

Commenting on the award, Thome Group CEO Olav Nortun said, “I am delighted that the Thome Group has won this award as it highlights how much emphasis we have put on ensuring that we make as minimal an impact on the environment as possible. I would especially like to thank our Environmental Compliance Department in supporting our crews and office staff with training and information to help ensure we comply with all necessary environmental regulations. My thanks also goes to everyone who voted for us, as having our commitment recognised by our industry peers is very humbling.”

Mr. Sean Hutchings, Thome Group’s Chief Operating Officer - Bulk Division added, “I would like to add my congratulations and thanks to our team, especially our crew onboard, for working so hard in following proper procedures and processes which help maintain full compliance with environmental regulations. Respecting nature is so important to the future of our planet and Thome’s staff go the extra mile in helping with various CSR activities including beach cleaning, tree planting and raising funds for victims of natural disasters”
Keeping the Lines of Communication Open

By Anna Marie Soliman, Corporate Communications and Marketing Manager, Thome Ship Management Pte Ltd – ROHQ

During the current crisis it is critical for an organization to come up with regular communications for its employees to reinforce its commitment and communicate and share insights on how it can support them. People at all levels are impacted by the current situation and we have all changed the way we work, the way we live and how we interact both professionally and socially. To effectively deal with the impact, Thome needs to adapt and ensure it has an effective and robust communications plan in place.

The Thome Group came up with relevant communications for its employees to keep them up to date on the current situation and increase their engagement and involvement, despite having to work from home. We reinforced the importance of keeping one’s physical and mental health in check and provided tips on how to overcome stress and anxiety during isolation and quarantine.

Other information campaigns included increasing productivity during COVID-19 and managing one’s team during remote arrangements. We also launched a series of competitions for office staff with cash prizes. The competitions’ objectives are to increase engagement, highlight work/life balance and add a bit of fun and enjoyment.

Regular promotions and competitions are in the pipeline and we will continue to provide updated, fact-checked information about COVID-19. We are also utilizing all our communications platforms to ensure all information is relayed on time to our staff and external connections.

We also launched a seafarers’ competition in May, encouraging Thome’s seafarers to submit their artwork entries with the theme “Art in the time of Corona” – the art contest is meant to increase engagement among our seafarers, ease the anxiety and stress onboard and also showcase their talent to the public. They can win cash prizes for individual and team competitions which they can put towards the vessel fund.

Other campaigns were also launched to highlight and focus on a COVID-19 information drive advising various preventive measures to practiced onboard. Daily communication with the vessels is also being carried out by our Marine HR Team and Crewing Department for any issues or challenges that may arise during this period.

Clear, simple and effective workplace communications during the current COVID-19 is what’s needed in this challenging time. We can achieve excellent communication with our staff and clients and partners through teamwork, continuous collaboration and by using the appropriate tools available. Empathy and conveying kind and thoughtful messages in our communications can also help in easing the challenges both mentally and emotionally brought about by this global pandemic.
The EU Ship Recycling Regulation Explained

By Rajiv Malhotra, Technical Manager

Timeline
The European Union Ship Recycling Regulation (EUSRR) requires all vessels calling at an EU port and all existing EU flagged vessels (contracted before 31st December 2018), to have an Inventory of Hazardous Material (IHM) by 31st December 2020. All new EU flagged vessels, contracted after 31st December 2018, are already required to comply.

In view of this looming deadline and the lack of experience onboard in various parts of the world due to the COVID-19 pandemic; it is strongly advised that vessels complete this process as a priority.

Upon completion, the vessel will automatically comply with IMO’s Hong Kong Convention (HKC), already adopted by The Marine Environment Protection Committee in May 2009 and awaiting ratification by a minimum of 15 states, representing at least 40% of world’s gross tonnage, for enforcement.

Process
Existing vessels need to undergo onboard sampling (to test for the presence of the fifteen kinds of regulated hazardous materials), preparation of IHM part 1, and survey and certification by the administration or recognized organisation.

Recently built vessels should have acquired the inventory and certification prior delivery from the shipbuilding yard, based on the Material Declarations (MD) and Supplier’s Declarations of Conformity (SDoC) received for different equipment. It should, however, be ascertained with the certification authority that the documentation and certification meet the standards under EUSRR and HKC.

IHM Maintenance
A vessel that acquires certification will be subject to a renewal survey, every fifth year, besides periodic assessment by the attending surveyors, for continuous compliance.

As it is therefore essential to continually maintain IHM, by updating for any hazardous material presence in new installations and routine procurements and obtaining MDs and SDoCs from the respective suppliers.

This requires establishing a good system for IHM maintenance, interfacing it with the purchasing system and a good control over the procurement process and supply chain.

Asbestos management
Besides the requirements under HKC and EUSRR, since 01st January 2011, SOLAS has mandated that any materials newly installed onboard should be asbestos free.

If unacceptable levels of asbestos are tested from samples collected for IHM, an appropriate asbestos management plan would need to be enforced until the asbestos removal is accomplished at earliest opportunity.

Requirements prior to recycling
Before dismantling a ship, Inventory of Hazardous Materials Parts II and III, dealing with operationally generated waste and stores on board, are required to be prepared.

Further, a ‘Ship Recycling Plan’ needs to be prepared by a dismantling facility holding a valid ‘Document of Authorization Ship Recycling’, and verified by a surveyor, with the issuance of a ‘Statement of Compliance Ready for Recycling’ having 3 months’ validity, within which the vessel can be dismantled at the assigned facility.
At the beginning of the year, no one would believe that we would resort to the Business Continuity Plans (BCP) by mid-February due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

A large number of coastal states and shipping hubs including the USA, China, and Australia are severely affected by the pandemic.

The Thome Group recorded almost a 35% drop in PSC inspections in Q1-2020 as compared to the same period in 2019. However, it was not a complete stop, as authorities still boarded vessels to ensure safety inspections were not compromised in their territorial waters.

We will continue to see inspections taking place all around the world even if government pandemic measures and lockdowns are extended in the months to come.

In Thome, it’s business as usual.

We concluded Q1/2020 with zero detentions and with an impressive average of 0.74 observations per inspections against a KPI of 0.90 for year 2020.

Our core values “ExCITES” are prime drivers in ensuring we remain sustainable and resilient in these tough times. We need a wider realization that ensuring a safe working environment and full compliance is for the benefit of our own lives and not just for the sake of a successful PSC inspection. If we inculcate this thought process and adopt it in day to day operations on a vessel, then successful PSC inspections are not a distant dream requiring additional hard work.

There is no alternative to complying with robust & comprehensive safety management system procedures and we must continue to observe due diligence in shipboard periodic inspections, maintenance and crew training.

At the end of March, vessels completed phase 1 of “Fire Safety campaign”. Phase 2 and 3 will be rolled out as per the schedule.

It is expected that such campaigns will reduce the volume of PSC observations under the fire safety category, raise our crews’ awareness and further improve shipboard inspection and maintenance of emergency critical equipment.

Due to pandemic measures, each vessel’s crew have additional responsibilities. Delays in sign-off may affect morale as relief arrangements are difficult due to aviation restrictions.

These are testing times for our senior leaders onboard and office support staff to ensure we remain focused and continue our vigorous efforts in PSC preparations.

Vigilant monitoring of the status of certification and documentation is required as surveys may not be carried out due to stricter pandemic measures and prohibition of surveyors to board vessels in ports. The PSC office will check flag state correspondence on any formal extension of surveys and audits.

It is also expected that new inspection regimes will emerge as a result of prolonged pandemic measures and restrictions to access vessels. These may include remote video assessment using drones, real-time streaming videos of the vessel navigating under pilotage or even a boat drill as requested by a PSC officer. We must gear up for such situations especially as we may not have any advance warning or have time for preparation. Therefore, it is always prudent to ensure readiness and avoid unwarranted tiring man hours to rectify deficiencies which could have been prevented.
Addressing the Challenges of Ship Inspections

By Capt. Mukesh Kumar Singh, Marine Manager, Tanker Division

Arranging a SIRE and CDI inspection before the current expires is one of the important aspects required for the commercial acceptability of a tanker vessel. Our performance of CDI and SIRE inspections has been positive in general and we appreciate the support of our ship staff. Our vessels are maintained in a state of readiness so these inspections can take place at short notice.

Due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the situation is not the most conducive for conducting a vetting inspection. The situation is fluid and very dynamic and there are also challenges in arranging an inspection because of travel restrictions. In order to ensure that a vetting inspection is conducted in a timely manner, we are now endeavouring to arrange inspections on our vessels about 2 to 3 months before the expiry of the previous inspection. This measure will give sufficient time to find a suitable port where an inspection can be arranged. We remain in close contact with our vessels so that proper planning and preparation for an inspection can be carried out.

Both OCIMF and CDI have come up with guidance to inspectors for ensuring that these inspections are carried out safely while giving due consideration to precautions including social distancing and any health and safety considerations depending on location. Inspectors are required to exercise stringent control measures for ensuring that they remain free of any infection.

Thome has developed robust procedures for minimizing the risk of COVID-19 infection during an inspection. Following the inspections which took place last month, we received positive feedback from the Masters of our vessels where these inspections took place. Masters have praised the professional conduct of the vetting inspectors who came on board, being properly equipped with PPE and then cooperating with our ship staff in the implementation of our company procedures for dealing with visitors.

These are challenging times and our goal is to maintain our ships’ approval with oil majors while ensuring the good health and safety of all our sailing staff. We appreciate the support of all our colleagues at sea during these difficult times and we are positive that we will overcome this challenge together.
Keeping Our Planet Clean for Future Generations

By Capt. Atul Vatsa, Vice President, Compliance (Environmental, Marine & Safety)

The management of the impact to the environment by the different human activities can be broadly described as environmental management.

The major environmental impacts from shipping is to the air and water such as smokestack emissions and the discharges from the ship’s engine room, ballast and cargo area.

Primarily, smokestack emissions are caused by ships burning fuel for energy. Pollutants most closely linked to climate change and impacting public health include carbon dioxide (CO2), nitrogen oxides (NOx), sulphur oxides (SOx) and particulates. Ships aside from being the cheapest mode of transport, are also the most carbon-efficient method of transporting goods over longer distances.

A big ship will emit about 10 grams of carbon dioxide to transport one metric ton of cargo per kilometre. That’s roughly half as much as a train, one-fifth as much as a truck and nearly a fiftieth of what an airplane would emit to accomplish the same task.

On a global scale, marine shipping industry's yearly share of total emissions from human sources is CO2 2.2%, NOx 15%, SOx 13%. The IMO, the main regulatory body for world shipping, has introduced regulations and initiatives for the reduction of these emissions.

IMO has introduced Emission Control Areas or ECAS and the global sulphur cap 0.50% for marine fuels. It has also made the Energy Efficiency Design Index (EEDI) mandatory for new ships and the Ship Energy Efficiency Management Plan (SEEMP) a requirement for all ships.

These steps will ensure, by 2025, that all new ships will be a massive 30% more energy efficient than those built in 2014. The IMO's target is to reduce the total annual greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by at least 50% by 2050 compared to 2008.

Initiatives at IMO include the Global MTTC Network (GMN) and the GEF-UNDP-IMO Global Maritime Energy Efficiency Partnership (GloMEEP), to help lead maritime transport into a low-carbon future.

Regulations under MARPOL's six Annexes and Ballast Water Convention are formulated to lighten the impact of ship discharges on the environment. Our company SMS addresses the different regulations in the letter and spirit of the law, with procedures in place to ensure our managed ships do not pollute.

Quote: “We did not inherit the Earth from our ancestors; We have borrowed it from our children”. 
Managing any crisis onboard poses immense strain on the limited manpower and resources available onboard. Managing an outbreak of an infectious disease onboard on the other hand is even more challenging as it severely restricts the capability of mobilising shore resources which may already be under immense pressure globally as in the case of epidemics or large-scale pandemics such as the current COVID-19.

Despite the best efforts, due to the numerous travel restrictions and the dynamic nature of local, regional and national regulations and differences in the regional enforcement of certain measures, the planning and execution of medical support from shore may be severely restricted. These are challenging times not only for the maritime industry but society at large.

Early detection, prevention and control of infectious disease cases onboard ships must therefore continue to be a number one priority, to protect the health of crew and at the same time to effectively discharge Thome’s role of being an important contributor to maintain critical global supply chains.

Thome has in place a written plan for disease outbreak management for its fleet which provides comprehensive guidance covering issues such as:

• how to identify a suspected case;
• an isolation plan describing the location(s) where suspected cases should be temporarily and individually isolated until disembarkation;
• hygiene rules for the isolation room(s) including use of personal protective equipment (PPE), cleaning and disinfection procedures and waste management;
• options for onboard treatment and medical equipment inventories;
• and management of close contacts.

In implementing the outbreak management plan, Thome endeavours to keep its guidance updated at all times with regards to the fluid changes in the requirements and regulations in this highly connected and ever-changing environment. It is important to keep all crew members up to date on the most recent advice on hygiene and preventive measures as well as travel advice for affected areas.

We, at Thome, take into account guidance provided by bodies of international repute both in the shipping industry-BIMCO, ICS, International Group of P &I, Flag states and ROs among others, as well as the medical community- CDC, WHO; to tackle the challenges at both the operational and the medical levels.

Through our fleet broadcast circulars, near real time information and updates are promulgated to the ships’ crews. The ships in general are instructed to implement more frequent cleaning of commonly touched surfaces, safe distancing, use of PPE and access control. Onboard cleaning and disinfection strategies are adapted to the ships itineraries as well as the number of onboard visitors from shore and their access to ship areas.

We, at Thome, maintain constant communication with the port authorities as well as our appointed agents to monitor our global port calls and to ensure necessary mitigations are in place at all times. We have also tested our business continuity plan by carrying out remote crisis management drills with our fleet vessels to ensure we are ready to handle any kind of emergencies onboard and working from home arrangements are in place globally for all our shore staff.

Thome has set up the tools and equipment to ensure we are fully equipped and operational to meet the needs of all our stakeholders. At Thome we are ‘Business as usual’.

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Crisis Management Ashore and at Sea

By Capt. Atul Vatsa, Vice President, Compliance (Environmental, Marine & Safety)
Enclosed Space Entry and Gas Measurement

By Capt. JEM Guilas, Technical Training Instructor

In the busy and complex world of shipping, a single mistake from an individual can have detrimental consequences. For a ship operation, like an enclosed space entry, the price of a mistake can be the life of those who are involved.

The new SOLAS regulation XI-1/7 for atmosphere testing instruments for enclosed spaces, requires ships to carry an appropriate portable atmosphere testing instrument or instruments, capable, as a minimum, of measuring concentrations of oxygen, flammable gases or vapours, hydrogen sulphide and carbon monoxide, prior to entry into an enclosed space. Additionally, a mandatory enclosed space entry and operation drill which includes actual entry, use of equipment, and permit and rescue, must be carried out on board. This is to be carried out at two monthly intervals.

Recent enclosed space incidents serve as a clear reminder that entry into such spaces without following proper procedures can result in seafarers being seriously injured or even losing their lives.

At Thome, we make sure that seafarers are protected from the dangers of this operation. Our enclosed space entry procedures from TGP 1.2.4 Chapter 5 ensures that the operation will be carried out in the safest way possible. The onboard training, drills and CBT application proves useful in enhancing our seafarers’ knowledge. We also have a mandatory one day shore-based training requirement for all seafarers prior to them being allowed on board.

This shore-based training was recently revised to cover the new requirement reflected in our TGP 1.2.4 Chapter 5, with additional modules which improved the quality of the training.

The whole training consists of a theoretical module with a question and answer section and a case analysis where participants are grouped together making them principals of the case involved. In the practical module, actual gas testing and equipment calibration are carried out, and finally the participants assessment. There is lots of interaction during the whole day of training as participants actively share their experiences and concerns. There are at least 4 senior officers from the L&D department helping and working together in delivering the required training for the seafarers.

An enclosed space is all about danger. But with the proper approach, correct knowledge and right mentality, the dangers can be removed and the operation can be carried out safely.
How to Stay Healthy During Lockdown

By TGN Editorial Team

At the time of writing this article, a large portion of the world’s population is in some form of lockdown which has been imposed by governments to curb the spread of COVID-19.

This has resulted in a huge majority of office based staff having to work from home, many of whom are experiencing this type of remote working for the very first time.

Without the daily routine of travelling to work and the face to face interaction with colleagues in the office, it can be very easy for some workers to quickly feel socially isolated which can cause mental health issues like depression.

Equally, as many of us cannot attend exercise classes or go to gyms during the lockdown period, our exercise routines can quickly fall by the wayside making us feel unfit and lethargic.

However, there are ways to ensure working at home can be successful and productive.

It is key that you ensure, where possible, that you have a set area in your home for your workstation. Make sure that your laptop or computer is at the right height to avoid back strain. Ideally, the screen should be at eye level so that you are not hunched over your computer.

Make sure you take regular breaks, make yourself stand up and walk around your home every hour to stretch your legs and give your eyes a rest from the screen.

Do not skip lunch as it is important for mind and body that we eat healthily and rest. You will find that you will work better in the afternoon if you take an hour’s lunch break rather than working through and just eating a sandwich at your workstation.

Make time for colleagues to catch up with them and find out how they are doing. Many companies promote conference calls during lunch breaks where colleagues can stay in touch and socialise. This is so important for your mental health.

In your leisure time, try to go outside (if permitted) to exercise. It is amazing what a nice walk, cycle ride or run in the fresh air can do for your well-being and overall fitness.

If this is not permitted then look online for exercise classes. Many gyms are running these for free so you can keep up with your regular exercise classes either by doing a ‘live’ session so you feel part of a group or you can take part in a pre-recorded version which you do whenever you want.

The important thing to remember is that this will be over soon and then we can get back to our normal routines but in the meantime we can work around these restrictions and make the best of what we have.
Laurence Mark C. Alderte of TSM Shipping (Phils.), Inc. recently won an award from The Swedish Mercantile Marine Foundation, an award-giving body that recognizes and rewards seafarers who exert extraordinary efforts to improve working conditions at sea. The awards ceremony will be held in Sweden later this year. The panel of assessors chose Alderte’s entry for the category called Work Award. The 39-year-old able-bodied seaman invented a portable davit, a device that lifts heavy pipe reducers – allowing easy connection with the manifold. The invention is basically designed to lift heavy reducers easily and save seafarers from possible injuries. Life at sea is very challenging but with safe working practices and the right mindset, a seafarer can go a long way.

Alderte believes that safety is an important part of the job and it should never be compromised. This has been his guiding principle for the last six years that he has been sailing with the company. “Safe working practices prevent accidents and losses. In a way, adhering to safety policies in the workplace contributes to environmental protection,” he said.

Apart from safe working practices, he also regards integrity as a passport to build a lasting career in the maritime industry. “I still have bigger goals to achieve and no matter how tough the job is, we can always rely on honesty and dedication at the end of the day,” he added.
Preventing the Spread of COVID-19 Onboard

By Capt. Gultekin Tugcu, Silver Houston

The COVID-19 outbreak became the top concern of everyone onshore and onboard. In addition to the standard measures as instructed by company circulars, we performed frequent and brief extraordinary safety meetings. Despite very simple measures being implemented, it can be difficult to become accustomed to them. Brief meetings are useful to convert these measures into habits as they will need to be maintained for longer than expected. Such short meetings are also very useful to pass updated information, correct use of material and protecting crew from irrelevant and inaccurate information posted on social media channels.

The measures implemented against this new pandemic will only be effective with the strict adherence of each crew member onboard. We must be rigorous in implementation for the safety of everyone involved.

Some of the measures onboard were as follows:

**Isolation of accommodation**
- When vessel arrived China for dry-dock, the number of the people we deal with daily increased. In order to contain the risk of third party personnel onboard we implemented a few measures:
  - Converted the gym room into a meeting room for port officials and shipyard laborers
  - Assign a toilet on upper deck, reserved for people other than ship’s crew.
  - The surrounding of the A/C air inlet was isolated for passage
  - Chlorine solution was placed at the entrance of accommodation and staircases and used for cleaning the soles of shoes.

**Pilot**
- The pilot was escorted to the bridge avoiding the accommodation.
- 1 set of equipment (Radar and ECDIS) reserved for pilot use only
- Maximum possible distance was maintained during pilot / Master information exchange.
- All equipment used by pilot including radar/VHF / ECDIS keyboards were disinfected with alcohol upon his disembarkation.
- The bridge /including floor was cleaned thoroughly.

**Port officials**
- Officials are accepted in dedicated meeting rooms only and escorted at all times in the accommodation areas. Spaces inspected by port officials such as the provision store and its passageways are cleaned after the inspections.

**Daily cleaning**
- All public places are cleaned with detergent and chlorine solutions at the end of working day once everyone has disembarked. Cleaning of public spaces, handrails, floors, etc.

**Coping with side effects**
- Extended contracts and limitation of shore leave will be another challenge for us in the near future. Since the shipyard period is very hectic for us, we have not felt such side effects yet. To help with this we have organized regular social activities on board after departure and purchased new games and equipment.
Sharing Love in This Time of Corona

By Angelica Cruz, Corporate Communications and Marketing Senior Executive, Thome Ship Management Pte Ltd - ROHQ

The coronavirus has caused a declaration of community quarantine in the entire Luzon region as well as the other provinces in the Philippines to help prevent its mass spread. Because of the lockdown, many families were obliged to stay home and were no longer allowed to go outside and work – which has strongly affected those who are below the poverty line.

On April 14, 2020, Per Selmer-Olsen, Thome ROHQ Vice President, has given monetary donation to our charity partner, Bridge Builder Foundation (BBF) Norway, Inc. which will be used to buy food, milk, rice, baby diapers, and other essential items in this time of crisis.

The cash donation was immediately used to purchase the essentials which were whole heartedly repacked and distributed by the volunteer heroes of the BBF Center.

On 16 April, as supervised by the BBF Center Resident Agent Ms. Roslyn Verendia, around 32 plastic containers with 5 kilos of rice were equally distributed to families in need as well as 2 large boxes of milk and baby diapers in the garage area of the BBF Center. As mandated by the government, volunteers and recipients were all wearing protective face masks and social distancing was observed during the distribution of these goods.

The entire staff, families, and beneficiaries of the BBF Center were happy and grateful for the help they received from the Thome Group. Indeed, any amount of help, regardless of its size, will make a huge difference especially to those who are in need.

We hope many more good Samaritans will also take this lead.