Autonomous and Remotely-Operated Ship Safety Fatality File

Can Autonomous Vessel Cut Death Rates in Shipping and Logistics Industry?

The untimely death of 17 US Navy crew member has made the case of autonomous vessels stronger. A series of tragic events that we witnessed this year made us ponder over the use autonomous ships in order to reduce human errors. Even the largest transport and logistics insurance authority, the TT Club, speak of the hazards of working on the sea.

The news of a 2nd tragic death rocked the boat this week. A driver was killed by a reefer container when it fell onto his truck. Most union leaders blame the human-operated and automated systems which require regular up-gradation. Almost 15% of such accidents involve heavy equipment like stackers, cranes, or straddle carriers, and hence result in serious injuries and death. Nearly 30% of accidents occur in the cargo handling sector which involves heavy vehicles like trucks (23%), cranes (19%), straddle carriers (13%) etc., reports the TT Club.

Introducing technology in Ports and Terminals will mitigate the dangers as most mechanical processes are done there which accounts for the high insurance claims (precisely, one third) lodged with the brokers. However, it needs to be grafted with a relevant operational procedure to protect the workforce, cargo and visitors to the site.

The 4 operational procedures are highlighted the TT Club which could drastically cut down the accident rate. One-way traffic system for cargo management is the initial step which will minimize hazards at the ports and enhance the productivity rate. Limiting access to unauthorized and untrained visitors is another step that might prove helpful. The last recommendation is a safe, separate location to lock and unlock trailer/chassis twist locks by truckers. Although this falls under a driver’s responsibility yet most drivers are forbidden to leave the vehicle.

Though machines go wrong sometime yet some aspects require automation. This will create a system programmed to remotely guide trucks to the ideal spot for loading and unloading cargo, away from the presence of humans. Therein lie the advantages and shortcomings of an autonomous operation system. We can programme machines for the loading, unloading, and transport of cargo yet the final check requires human intervention.

The way out is the creation of a risk-free environment. Even if it isn’t possible to fully eliminate the risk, automation can considerably reduce it.