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Survival suits for all crew members next year

IMO regulation changes on ships' safety equipment, due to come into force next year, have helped open up a new market for survival suits for two Norwegian supply companies. International marine equipment supplier Stromme ASA, of Haslum, and survival suit manufacturer Helly Hansen Spezialprodukter, of Moss, have joined forces in a bid to tap this fresh market opportunity.

New rules, adopted in May last year, mean that from July 2006, all shipping companies will be required to equip their vessels with one survival suit for each crew member as specified on the ship's safety certificate. Existing regulations demand only a small number of such suits.

In June, Stromme and Helly Hansen announced they had reached agreement on the distribution of survival suits produced by the Helly Hansen group company to Stromme's worldwide shipping clients.

The new rules will generate substantial market growth with the total potential estimated to be worth in the region of Nkr750 million. The company has set itself the target of capturing a worldwide market share from this of around 10%.

'This agreement will enable us to offer our over 350 international shipping customers suits of the highest quality. The Helly Hansen suits perform exceptionally well, one of their features being that they allow the hands to be released easily for performing necessary tasks during a rescue operation,' said Stromme's chief executive officer Christian Krefling. The product should fit well among the rest of his firm's marine safety equipment and lifeboat portfolio, he added.



Hands free: Stromme ASA will distribute the Helly Hansen survival suit which allows the wearer freedom to perform rescue tasks.

Stromme has grown steadily since it was formed in 1971 as a traditional supplier of technical equipment to the shipping industry. It was granted listing on the Oslo Stock Exchange four years ago and today, after gradual international expansion through acquisition, has a network of operating companies in eight countries.

It comprises two business areas: marine equipment and supply & logistics. A recent strategic acquisition was the February 2005 takeover of Norwegian Maritime Equipment AS, based at Husnes, which has provided Stromme with a source of new products in the fields of cranes, lifeboats, and safety equipment.

LASS: aiming to boost use of safe lightweight materials

FIRE risk has presented a major obstacle to the greater use of lightweight materials at sea, but a newly-launched Swedish project aims to establish ways of improving such safety aboard many types of ship. A three-year project, 'Lightweight Construction Applications at Sea' (LASS), backed by national shipping lines, shipyards and designers, aims to develop and demonstrate ways of using light materials and lightweight ship designs.

Its coordinator, SP Fire Technology, part of the SP Swedish National Testing & Research Institute (SP), aims to examine the various means available to enhance fire safety where lightweight ship design is employed. LASS will investigate the use of combinations of steel, aluminium, and composites in various types of ship, including high-speed passenger ferries, ro-ro vessels, smaller tankers, and fully composite ships, such as stealth-type naval vessels.

The project recognises the need for greater use of new technology in Sweden's merchant marine sector, which represents a significant

part of the country's industry. This is particularly important today as Swedish shipping is facing severe competition.

Lightweight products and designs are becoming increasingly important for the transport industry in general, not least in the marine sector. Composites or aluminium materials are now being used, so as to reduce weight and for the construction of high-speed vessels. The lighter a vessel is, the more deadweight it can carry or the less energy it will require for propulsion. Replacing heavier conventional materials, in ship superstructures for example, lowers the centre of gravity, in turn allowing either the volume of ballast to be reduced or for ballast to be replaced by useful cargo capacity. In addition, reduced fuel costs bring major environmental benefits.

However, the development of lightweight materials at sea is being impeded, SP points out, not only by various technical difficulties, but also by classification and design regulations based on the use of steel. The organisation concedes that lightweight materials generally have lower fire resistance than traditional steel,

and they can actually make a direct contribution to a fire if, for example, plastics are used. Thus, a major area of investigation by the LASS study will be reducing fire hazards.

While the project is expected also to benefit small boats in the recreational craft sector, those behind it see it resulting in new opportunities for lightweight structures in larger ships. The study will not simply focus on the standard lightweight type of vessel (built to the HSC code) but look also at ro-ro ferries and car carriers. Lighter fabrication would enable more cargo to be loaded aboard ships such as the giant car/truck carriers operated by the Wallenius Line (and its joint operating company Wallenius Wilhelmsen).

Along with shipyards, designers and shipping lines, LASS will directly involve the defence industry, industrial organisations, and research institutes including SICOMP and SSPA as well as universities including Chalmers and the Swedish Royal Institute of Technology. Financing of the study will come from the Swedish Agency for Innovation Systems.