

interview

Meeting innovators in the global cruise industry



interview
International Cruise Ship Industry

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Andreas Ullrich, Bureau Veritas' Global Market Leader, Passenger Ships

Getting the cruise ships and ferries up and running again

News of Bureau Veritas' (BV) success with its 'Restart your Business' service offering to passenger ship and ferry operators, since its launch in April, prompted International Cruise Ship Industry (ICSI) to talk with Andreas Ullrich, BV's Global Market Leader, Passenger Ships, who explained how this service works.

Q: Can you explain about the Bureau Veritas' (BV) 'Restart your Business' initiative and the associated 'Safeguard' labelling?

A: BV has developed an innovative new service – 'Restart Your Business' - to help operators restart or to help maintain or expand their services, providing a high degree of confidence that passengers, crew, and other stakeholders are being protected against pandemic risks.

What is 'Restart Your Business' (RYB)?

- 'Restart your Business with BV' addresses biological risks, as posed by COVID-19, providing procedures and measures to protect people.
- The new service includes a framework for standards-based on audits and certification, providing operators, crew and passengers with assurance demonstrated by a new BV label - 'Safeguard'.

'Restart Your Business with BV' is designed to address the risks specific to all the places that people live and work. For example, BV is helping hotel groups, restaurant chains, and other hospitality businesses to restart in pandemic conditions. Now available specifically for cruise ships and passenger ferries, RYB combines BV's global testing, inspection, and certification capabilities across the global industry with its marine and offshore classification expertise.

Passenger vessels have been particularly vulnerable in the pandemic and operations have



Both internal and external audits are carried out to obtain 'Safeguard'

ceased. The framework developed by BV specifically addresses the requirements of passenger ships.

Currently, we're working with cruise and ferry operators who are either beginning to restart their operations, paused by the disruption from COVID-19, or want to continue with the confidence provided by BV's certifications.

Recently, 20 of Attica Group's fleet received 'Safeguard' labelling following audits. CroisiEurope is working with us to achieve 'SafeGuard' status for the 32 river cruise vessels and seagoing ships, as well as two of their terminals. In addition, PONANT, the expedition cruise company with a fleet of 11 expedition luxury ships is working with us, as it seeks to safeguard its return to operations. Further companies have signed, or soon will be confirming RYB contracts.

Q: Is this service also open to vessels classed by other societies, or is it exclusively for BV classed passenger ships?

A: The Restart service and labelling are not only for BV classed ships – but are also available to all passenger ship operators. BV has a 12% market share of existing cruise ships and a substantial share of classification of ferry services worldwide.

As shipping needs an unprecedented effort to resume its activities, we're opening our 'SafeGuard' label to every shipowner who is looking to resume their operations with the adequate health and safety standards to mitigate COVID-19 transmission.

Our 'Restart your Business with BV' is also supporting a number of other sectors that face similar challenges to passenger shipping and other vessel types. The offshore sector for example, with the number of transient workers living in large accommodation blocks are facing distinct health and safety challenges, and we are applying our skills and expertise to that sector too.

Q: Is 'Safeguard' a BV class notation or simply a 'label' as described?

A: BV has been working across many industries to help develop new standards both with - and for, clients, to assure stakeholders and regulators that the risk of infection is being mitigated effectively. This service developed for passenger ships includes a framework of standards and best practices. Compliance with which is demonstrated by our new BV label - 'SafeGuard'.



A BV auditor seen on board one of the Attica Group's Blue Star Ferries in Piraeus

The intention is that the label is visible and helps provide confidence to all on board and in related operations ashore.

There is scope for a class notation, which is not only COVID-19 focused, but rather broadened to any biological risk. In the past, shipping has had to deal with the fallout from viruses, including norovirus and we've quickly adopted a 'business as usual' approach. A class notation, based on the 'SafeGuard' label, could be a good step in the direction of effective infection prevention.

Q: What are the main areas to be covered on board ship?

A: Anywhere that people need to be and where they interact with others. The more people and the greater the interaction, the greater the risk. So, all areas of the ship need to be addressed but in particular the passenger and crew areas, such as restaurants, cafeterias, cabins, washrooms, access points, gangways, lifts, and corridors.

For example, it is important to ensure that handwashing and sanitising stations are available in strategic locations on the ship and the terminal and that cleaning regimes are strictly upheld regularly in all areas of the ship. Wiping communal surfaces such as handrails, lift buttons, and door handles to prevent the spread of harmful viruses and bacteria is a must.

One area of focus is ensuring that the crew wear PPE when necessary or required. Transparent guards should be implemented at face-to-face interaction stations, such as reception desks, on board bars, and payment areas - and such screens will need to be securely installed.

Finally, social distancing, whether sitting or standing, is a vital area to address. Crew and passengers should abide by distancing rules being adopted globally, with one-way systems and routing provided in specific areas of the ship.

Q: As part of the service, will a BV auditor/surveyor visit the vessel before she

re-enters service to conduct an inspection, make recommendations, etc before awarding 'SafeGuard'?

A: It is vital that a BV surveyor conducts an in-depth audit on board the vessel. However, this may be conducted remotely if circumstances require. The process makes sure that operator's plans are properly implemented, that the appropriate procedures are applied, that protocols are followed and that crew is sufficiently trained to follow and maintain the systems and able to deal with all questions and concerns of passengers and being able to communicate in a smart and friendly way.

Q: Could a BV surveyor conduct an audit simultaneously with a class survey?

A: Surveying and auditing are separate roles. But they may be combined. Many BV surveyors are also trained as auditors. The intervals for surveys and audits may also be different. RYB requires an audit before granting the certificate and label which of course could be performed together with any class or statutory survey if due at the time of the audit.

Furthermore, as class evolves and the processes change, neither will our 'SafeGuard' procedure remain static. Our RYB initiative will be continually evolving as we keep in mind the question of: what's next? Considering the effects of the pandemic and how to deal with the aftermath, we can anticipate that the requirements of 'SafeGuard' labelling will evolve to address changes needed to effectively address evolving pandemic requirements.

BV's Restart initiative is based on the analysis of guidance documents from recognised bodies - including the World Health Organisation, International Chamber of Shipping, INTERFERRY, and the IMO, as well as local regulations. Of course, if guidance from these authorities' changes, this would be reflected in our approach.

Q: Would BV like to see this service become mandatory instead of voluntary, inspected by Port State Control for example?

A: Sanitary auditing and labelling could become mandatory rather than a voluntary inspection, with a framework that is international in scope rather than local.

Ideally regulation should be a level playing field globally with agreed, applicable, and enforceable requirements for all in shipping's ecosystem. But many cruise ship operators will be operating in trades that require adherence to specific domestic requirements and conditions and many

ferries, in particular may not even be subject to international regulations.

Q: Can the service be applied to the shoreside operations, both in an operator's commercial and technical offices and port terminals?

A: Yes, the service can be applied to shore-side offices and even port terminals if requested. BV strongly recommends the application of similar measures as on board to mitigate the risk of being infected or transmitting infection. In our view this is vital and therefore we strongly recommend that ports follow the same rules and guidelines as passenger ships.

Q: Ports worldwide, backed by their government administrations, appear to be calling the shots when banning cruise ships. Would 'Safeguard' help cruise operators in their quest to return to cruising hotspots, such as Alaska, etc?

A: Port authorities should have confidence in accepting cruise and ferry operators knowing that they have had their vessel inspected by a third-party independent body. 'SafeGuard', an independent certification of on board organisational procedures from a major classification society like BV, will give port operators the confidence to allow operations to resume and provide transparency and clarity as to

both the measures taken and that they have been audited.

Q: We have seen some cruise ship operators take advantage of the stoppage to drydock their vessels. Is BV expecting a lot of drydock work in the near future?

A: As some dockings have been postponed due to the crisis, there might be more work. Passenger ships need an inspection of the ship's bottom every year. In the case of new ships and ships of less than 15 years of age, this inspection needs to be performed at least once within the 5-year class period in a drydock. The remaining annual bottom inspections between dockings may be performed in-water.

However, this still needs to be agreed upon by flag state administrations. Older ships must go into dock at least twice in every five year class period and with not more than 36 months between drydockings. The intermediary bottom inspections can be performed in-water as well.

However, some flag state administrations require annual bottom inspections in a drydock, especially for older ships. Also, inspections in drydock may be required in case of damage or potential damage concerns following, for example, an incident such as a grounding.

Fleets signed up

At the beginning of July, BV had signed up four cruise and ferry operators to its restart service.

These were - Baleária Ferries (12 ships and two terminals); Attica Group (30 plus ferry fleet); CroisiEurope (30 river cruise ships and two seagoing cruise vessels), plus Ponant (11 cruise/expedition ships).

Speaking on behalf of PONANT when the company signed up for the service, Frédéric Gallois, PONANT's Chief Operating Officer, explained: "The small size of our vessels, the medical infrastructure and teams on board, our protocols and the professionalism of our crews ensured that there were no cases of Covid-19 contamination throughout the PONANT's fleet. To prepare for the resumption of our activity, we are pleased to collaborate with Bureau Veritas to deploy this SafeGuard label highlighting the excellence of our protocols."

For CroisiEurope, the Schmitter family, said: "We are delighted to partner with Bureau Veritas for setting up the SAFEGUARD label. This certification confirms the efficiency of the health protocol our teams have been working on for several weeks. It will allow our guests and crews to stay in high health security environment for the restart of our cruises."

Spyros Paschalis, Attica Group CEO, commented: "Attica Group is systematically implementing measures towards the protection of the health of its passengers and crews on board its vessels. Since the first day of the outbreak of COVID-19 we intensified and adapted our procedures accordingly, remaining always in close collaboration with the Health Authorities.

"During this process we became familiar with 'Restart your Business with BV'. Bureau Veritas, after checking carefully our procedures and based on the standards it has established, concluded that they are being implemented correctly and proceeded to the issuance of certification for each vessel with the 'SAFEGUARD' label, demonstrating that the services offered by Attica Group are effectively addressing health, sanitation and hygiene requirements.

"I would like to thank Bureau Veritas for their co-operation and to welcome our passengers on board for a magnificent and hygiene-protected trip," he said.

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