Health and Safety Management' (HSE 1997) they state that, 'Communication…is often seen as the single most important area requiring improvement.'

This publication suggests that organizations should consider the requirements of importance for health and safety information coming into, flowing within and going out of an organization. A few examples of what is considered to be important aspects of information that flow through an organization are listed below:

- Information coming into the organization
  - The latest legislation and how to comply with it
  - Technical developments on risk control
  - Good practices from other sites, the industry in general or other relevant sources
- Information flowing within the organization
  - Company policies, visions, mission statements and values
  - Plans, standards, procedures, performance expectations and performance measures in the form of newsletters, posters, emails, face-to-face discussions, job descriptions etc.
  - Comments and suggestions for improvement
  - Lessons learned from incidents and accidents
  - Visible behaviors such as management visits to site to provide the opportunity for face to face interaction with the workforce
  - Taking a lead in meetings
  - Involvement in incident investigations.
- Information flow from the organization
  - Statutory information to regulatory authorities, such as accident or ill-health reports; emergency plans
  - Information about the safety of articles or substances supplied for use at work.

The information that flows into, within and out of the organization described above focuses on health and safety matters, but the same channels of communication are critical to the success of running the business – site tours and inspections, meetings, written publications etc. – and it is typical, and useful, now that many companies combine business and safety issue; for example, putting health and safety matters at the top of the agenda for every business meeting.

Safety critical communications are the subject of a short HSE 'Briefing Note' (HSE 2004) and a similar Briefing Note from the Energy Institute (Energy Institute 2003) which provide useful checklists to enable you to assess your own communications issues They are available free online (HSE and Energy Institute websites).

Thus, communication problems appear common across all industries: nuclear, oil and gas, aviation, process industry and the railway industry. The case study below amply illustrates – from a single incident – the range of communication problems, as well as poor practices and procedural circumventions that can occur within the maritime industry.

A Case Study in Poor Communications

The Marine Accident Investigation Branch Digest no.3 (MAIB - 2009.) described some of the problems found on board merchant vessels during 2009; this included poor inter-personal skills and communications. Several such problems were illustrated by an incident that took place on board a roll-on roll-off cargo vessel. Whilst the vessel was at berth, the crew carried out routine maintenance. The engineering team had discovered an important defect with the generators - they would not auto start – but, because of poor relations between the chief engineer and crew, they did not report this to him.