‘Fire In The Hold’ A Relic Of The Past With Maritime Thermal Event Monitoring

The phrase ‘fire in the hold’ could be consigned to the dustbin of maritime history if the shipping industry was obliged to install thermal imaging systems on all new cargo vessels.

Critical thermal event alarm notification and monitoring solutions have received renewed attention from the global maritime sector following a series of devastating fire-related incidents involving cargo ships.

“Thermal-based events have a long and unfortunate history in shipping,” says Philip Smerkovitz, Managing Director of thermal imaging specialist, GoThermal.co.za. “And they don’t always involve raging infernos.”

Mr Smerkovitz points to the fact that the Titanic, for example, was on fire for days before it sank. “We know now that an out-of-control coal fire played a part in the sinking of the world’s most famous vessel,” he says.

Just last month, a major fire in the coal repository of a bulk carrier was reported in the Indian port of Haldia. The fire was reported to be ‘major’ and needing the attention of all firefighting vehicles in the area.

“The problem with coal fires is that the nature of the product means smoldering embers can often be inadvertently brought aboard. This is where thermal imaging really comes into its own,” Mr Smerkovitz says.

Thermal imaging solutions installed at coal plants can help ensure that contaminated product can be scanned for thermal signatures before coal is then transported to the vanning area where it is further scanned and monitored before being taken aboard. Aboard ship, handheld equipment can further complete the thermal safety loop.

GoThermal.co.za has collaborated with world leaders in thermal imaging, FLIR Systems, to develop, sell and support critical thermal temperature notification and monitoring solutions ideally-suited for the local and overseas maritime industry.

Remotely monitoring equipment and facilities with thermal cameras can detect potential issues unseen to the human eye. This means a rise in temperature amongst coal cargo, for example, can be detected long before the fire stage.

GoThermal.co.za solutions manage temperature-related events remotely and in real-time via the web using thermal sensors connected to video alarm verification servers.

Monitoring and regulating specific temperature ranges is critical when transporting coal, in particular, to prevent critical, fire-generating temperatures from being reached. “Just a few cameras can scan the biggest hold searching for events likely to lead to fire if left unchecked,” Mr Smerkovitz adds.

Any industry where temperature is critical in the production or delivery process can benefit from thermographic camera sensors connected to video alarms as in the GoThermal.co.za solutions. Temperature events can now be managed from any Internet-enabled remote location effortlessly using any iOS or Android mobile device.

Thermal cameras produce radiometric images of the scene, allowing for non-contact temperature measurement in every pixel. Alarms can be triggered by selecting areas for maximum or minimum temperature thresholds or changes in temperature. Multiple areas in a scene can be monitored simultaneously for critical changes.

“Users can view entire scenes of events in seconds on their mobile devices and use remote functionality from our app to make and action decisions quickly no matter where they are in the world,” says Smerkovitz. Control rooms and desktop computers can also be brought into the loop,” Smerkovitz says.

Events can be responded to swiftly and precisely to minimise or even totally prevent losses and damages caused by temperature-related incidents. “Our solutions are capable of detecting the smallest fluctuations in temperature that can have really big cost implications later on if not properly and immediately managed,” concludes Smerkovitz.