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Meridian Marine Management closing amid claims of fraud

Saturday, 13 October 2012 | 00:00



A Liverpool marine management company is closing with the loss of around 40 jobs, amid claims of fraud.

Meridian Marine Management, in Duke Street, has been in existence for almost 15 years, but is set to close next month.

It says the closure and the alleged fraud are unconnected.

The company specialises in providing a range of services for ship owners and shipping lines, including technical, crew, cadet and project management and consultancy.

A Meridian employee has been arrested in connection with an alleged fraud involving the payment of crew wages.

The Post understands that the arrested man is crewing manager Oliver Heard.

A police spokesman said: "Merseyside Police can confirm a 32-year-old man was arrested in May this year in relation to an allegation of fraud in connection to a business in Liverpool city centre.

"The man was bailed pending further enquiries and the matter is still under investigation."

It is understood police are investigating an allegation that a "ghost" crew member was created on a number of ships with the wages paid into a personal bank account.

It is claimed the alleged fraud lasted two years and involved fraudulent payments of as much as £3m before it was uncovered.

An insider said once clients, including some major shipping lines, learned of the alleged fraud they severed links, which, he said, is behind the closure.

However, although Diarmuid Lundy, general manager of Meridian Marine Management, confirmed the closure of the office, he claimed it was not related to the fraud allegations.

He told the Post: "The office is in the process of closing, regardless of what you are investigating, not for those reasons."

Meridian claims it is closing the office due to changes in business conditions and company spokesman Pat Adamson said: "The Oliver Heard thing is an unintentional operational issue that has come up separately." Meridian provides services for ship owners and shipping lines around the world, particularly for operators of ro-pax and ro-ro vessels, or passenger and car ferries.

A company statement said: "Meridian Marine Management, which has for the past 10 years acted as the ship management arm primarily for the ro-ro and ro-pax vessels of owners, Pacific Basin and Epic, is being wound down as the shareholders reduce their commitment to the sector and as many of the vessels involved are actively being marketed for sale."

Alastair Evitt, Meridian chief executive, added: "Any ship management organisation requires scale in order to provide the necessary levels of technical management, compliance and crew management and we believe that with the shrinking, essentially, in-house fleet, we cannot sustain the levels of support required to meet the stringent requirements of this sector."

The Post was unable to contact Mr Heard.

Source: Liverpool Post

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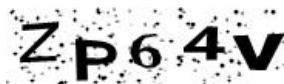
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