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Port Agency in the Maritime Industry

An agent refers to someone who acts on behalf of another person or firm. In the case of port agency, it plays a significant role as a part of shipping services in the maritime industry. Before a vessel's arrival, a port agent starts to work. To begin with, a port agent needs to guarantee that a proper mooring or berth is allotted to the vessel and the required documents are ready for immigration and customs. In addition, the port agent must insure that all government procedures required to be fulfilled by the ship's captain are in order. In the meantime, a port agent needs to be physically present in order to take care of the vessel's needs (notably berth reservation, legal representation, refueling, stevedore contracting, repairs), as well as, insuring that the vessel and its crew are free from any illegalities. Hence, a port agent is required to have a very clear record – criminally. Any person with a criminal or a police record is disqualified from being a port agent. In addition, a port agent also needs to take responsibility of other minor shipping services such as the removal of garbage, luggage handling and medical assistance for crewmembers and passengers.

In Hong Kong, there are about 50 port agency companies, including such well known companies as Wallem Shipping (HK) Ltd, Kong Hing Agency Limited, Jardine Shipping Agencies (Hong Kong) Ltd and Ben Line Agencies (HK) Ltd. All these port agency companies operate on an international scale, providing a wide variety of agency services on a 24/7 basis. Most importantly, they can resolve any unexpected issues quickly and efficiently. This allows a ship owner to maintain the normal and routine course of business without any interfering disruptions.

Although port agencies generate significant economic benefits and create job opportunities in Hong Kong, there are key challenges facing the industry. More and more experienced persons are retiring from the field while fewer and fewer younger people are willing to enter the port agency industry. Thus, there is a serious shortage of labor in the port agency industry. Moreover, very few institutions are providing port agency training courses. In the future, the HKSAR Government needs to pay closer attention to providing more resources for the development of the port agency industry in Hong Kong.