

# GIANT CRUISE SHIPS: TOO BIG, TOO DANGEROUS?



Greater and greater ships are launched every year. With the sinking of the Costa Concordia in Italy, the size of these giants raises many questions, including security. Can megaships deal with the consequences of a serious accident? Does size matter?

For several years, companies have invested in building megaships, ever larger. **The symbol of the trend is the Oasis of the Seas of Royal Caribbean Cruise Line, the largest cruise ship in the world:** 60 m long, 9 m draft, 220,000 tons, 18 decks, 30 bars and restaurants, 90,000 m<sup>2</sup> of carpet, 7,000 pieces of art, 2,300 tons of water in swimming pools ... Its enormous capacity is 5400 passengers and 2165 crew members!

Oasis is not the only megaship out there, since the company also has a sister ship, the Allure of the Seas. Other companies such as MSC, Carnival (parent company of Costa Cruises), RCI, Norwegian Cruise Line also have several ships with capacity exceeding 3000 passengers.

A report called "Large Ships, Questions and Possible Answers" by the French Institute of the Sea (IFM) published in April 2009 states that the trend appears irreversible. One of the authors' conclusions was that basically there are no technical limits as to the dimensions of ships. **The size is thus limited only by the imagination of engineers and designers.**

Perhaps there are no technical limits but what about the safety of passengers? The evacuation of 500 passengers still seems easier than of 3000 people. In light of the Costa Concordia accident, megaships might seem quite dangerous. However, in comparison to other means of transport the situation is not that grave, quite the contrary.

"Even in the worst case it is difficult to imagine that the mortality rate due to maritime accidents would even reach that of traffic accidents (several tens of thousands a year in Europe alone), or that due to airplane accidents," stated the IFM report. "The likelihood that a large ship sinks with all passengers and staff dead is very low."

Similarly, the French Association of Cruise Companies (AFCC) has recently stated that the size of modern ships has no impact on its safety. Moreover, accidents like the one of Costa Concordia have been extremely rare over the history of cruising.

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