

No. 6 - Stowaways

October 2000

Dear Sirs

Stowaways

In recent months there has been a dramatic increase in the number of stowaway incidents involving the use of containers, culminating earlier this year in the discovery of 58 dead stowaways in a trailer lorry at the port of Dover. Several Clubs within the International Group have dealt with cases involving Chinese stowaways being placed on board container ships in sealed containers at the port of Hong Kong, destined for North American ports. This recent development has attracted the attention of the United States Coastguard, Immigration Authorities and Federal Bureau of Investigation, all of whom are putting considerable pressure on carriers to demonstrate that they are dealing with the problem.

In view of this increased activity, the following guidelines are recommended for all container operators. Whilst the guidelines are specifically aimed at container operators, the recommended precautions are equally valid for other operators, including those carrying vehicles such as trailer lorries.

Prior to Terminal

Carriers are recommended to make further enquiries and take extra precautions at the time shipments are booked. Particular attention should be paid to the following:

- Trade patterns which have been the subject of past problems.
- Previously unknown shippers; company searches may be appropriate.
- New trading areas.
- Requests for empty containers to be delivered to insecure areas.
- Loaded containers collected from insecure areas.
- Open-topped containers, which should be inspected prior to acceptance.
- Lightweight shipments.
- Shipments in reefer containers set at relatively high temperatures.

At Terminal (prior to loading)

- In appropriate areas co-operation should be sought from local Immigration Authorities; their experience may be an essential asset.
- Carriers should emphasize to terminal operators the need for dialogue and co-operation in combating the ease with which stowaways are able to access containers due for shipment.
- Any containers presented for loading with no seals, faulty or tampered seals should be opened and checked before being re-sealed.

- All reefer containers with settings above, say, 10° centigrade should be opened and checked for stowaways.
- All open top containers should be inspected, particular attention should be given to any containers with signs of recent repair, repainting etc.
- Particular attention should be paid to containers that arrive in the terminal late, after the cut-off period and shortly before vessel loading commences. This tactic might be used to reduce the opportunity for detection and would also reduce stowaways' length of confinement.
- Consider the deployment of CO₂ detectors, heat detectors, sniffer dogs and/or heartbeat detectors. Methods of detection will vary from terminal to terminal. Agreement should be sought with each operator.
- Pay particular attention to any containers received from outside locations and especially from insecure uncontrolled areas.
- Containers for which obvious weight discrepancies exist should be identified and if necessary searched.

After loading

- On container ships, searches of empty spaces and deck vigilance prior to departure is necessary as with all other types of vessels.
- When appropriate, consider building time into the vessel's schedule to enable this to take place.
- Whenever possible it may be prudent to have men in the hatch when hatch covers are replaced as stowaways have been known to conceal themselves in the hatch cover structure when stowed ashore.
- Routine crew security and safety tours of the vessel should be undertaken and noted regularly in the vessel deck log.

Steps to be taken after a stowaway has been detected

- On discovering stowaways within containers review the stow position and accessibility. Inform vessel operations of the known facts, with container number, stow position and loading port, seeking directions.
- Urgent attempts must be made to communicate with the stowaways; consider using tape recorded messages (in various languages).
- Assess the situation. How many stowaways? What nationality? Try to determine their health. Do they present a threat to the vessel and crew? Do they require food and water? Consider drilling holes in the container to provide these, if feasible. If the stowaways can be released from the container, are there sufficient crew to safely supervise them in a secure area?
- Take into consideration the safety of the ship and crew, as well as the stowaways. Should the vessel divert? (Factors to be considered will include time since departure from loading port, estimated time of arrival at destination, time to the nearest suitable port if ship diverts, can that port cater for the vessel and provide fast access to the container?)
- Liaise closely with owners'/carriers' P&I Club.
- The Master should not be expected to carry the entire burden.
- Each case must be reviewed on its own merits and decisions taken jointly in consultation with the owners'/carriers' P&I Club.

No guidelines issued in advance can hope to cover all situations. However it is hoped that the foregoing recommendations will serve to assist in the prompt resolution of the majority of cases.

Yours Faithfully

American Steamship Owners Mutual Protection & Indemnity Association, Inc.
Assuranceforeningen Gard (Gjensidig)
Assuranceforeningen Skuld (Gjensidig)
The Britannia Steam Ship Insurance Association Ltd.
The Japan Ship Owners' Mutual Protection & Indemnity Association
Liverpool and London Steamship Protection & Indemnity Association Ltd.
The London Steam-Ship Owners' Mutual Insurance Association Ltd
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