



# Marine Safety Information Bulletin

Commandant  
U.S. Coast Guard  
Office of Commercial Vessel Compliance  
2703 Martin Luther King Jr Ave, SE, STOP 7501  
Washington, DC 20593-7501

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Contact: CG-CVC-2  
Phone: (202) 372-1251  
E-Mail: portstatecontrol@uscg.mil

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## Tianjin, China Explosions and Precautions for Possible Contamination

The purpose of this Bulletin is to provide notice to the maritime industry with respect to assessing potential contamination risks from the Tianjin explosions and the responsibility of vessel and facility agents, owners, masters, and operators to immediately report potentially hazardous conditions to the United States Coast Guard (USCG).

The USCG and Customs and Border Protection (CBP) are monitoring vessel traffic and cargo departing the port complex in Tianjin, China, following the tragic explosions on August 12th and 15th, 2015, due to concerns that there may be potentially hazardous ash, debris or residues on vessels or cargo bound for U.S. ports. Vessels impacted by the Tianjin explosions are expected to call on U.S. ports over the next several weeks. There have been no reports of vessels with confirmed hazardous debris or residues onboard, however U.S. companies are looking for reassurances regarding the health and safety of those who handle shipping containers across the supply chain. The Federal government is working with local, state and federal port and international partners to coordinate efforts to identify any potential risks on inbound vessels and cargo to help ensure public safety. For the purpose of this bulletin, an “impacted vessel” is any vessel that was in the Tianjin port complex, or that has loaded cargo or containers that were in the Tianjin port complex, at the time of the first explosion on August 12th through August 15th.

### Some key points to remember regarding this incident:

- Although there is much reporting in the media as to the situation in Tianjin, China, there is not yet clarity of the full extent or nature of any possible chemical contamination that may be aboard impacted vessels. Vessel owners and operators should be aware of the potential for hazardous ash, debris or residues onboard impacted vessels or containers, particularly in cargo bays and interior spaces not regularly exposed to the elements.
- Based on the currently available information regarding the incident and its aftermath, the Coast Guard is concerned that impacted vessels and cargo may have an increased risk of exposure to potentially hazardous chemicals. There is not yet available a comprehensive list of chemicals that were involved in the Tianjin incident; however, several hazardous chemicals are reported to have been in the main warehouse, including sodium cyanide (UN1689) and calcium carbide (UN1402).
- Given the substantial size of the explosions and the suspected hazardous chemicals that were involved, ships and cargo in port at or near the times of the explosions may have been exposed to potentially hazardous dust, ash, or debris. There have been no reports of vessels with confirmed hazardous ash, debris or residues onboard.

- Considering the lengthy ocean transit from Tianjin to U.S. ports and the significant exposure of the external surfaces of the vessel to wind, waves, and weather systems during that transit, the Coast Guard's primary concerns encompass any vessels that had cargo bays or hatch covers open when the blasts occurred, and any cargo or containers that were likewise exposed during the explosions. However, as there are many factors to consider in each case, the mere presence of vessel or cargo in Tianjin in the time window of concern does not necessarily mean that the impacted vessel must have been exposed and has a hazardous condition. However, out of an abundance of caution, the Department of Homeland Security is monitoring all U.S. bound cargo and vessel traffic that were in the port of Tianjin on or after August 12th.
- **Timely reporting of any potential hazardous conditions is critical.** Any suspected hazardous conditions, illnesses or unknown substances or residues should be reported to the nearest USCG Captain of the Port (COTP) as soon as possible in accordance with 33 C.F.R § 160.216.
- The COTP has the authority to deny a vessel entry into a U.S. port or direct vessel movement to a safe location should the COTP determine that the vessel poses an unacceptable risk to the safety of the port or the environment. The COTP will work with all affected industry stakeholders to ensure a response commensurate with the risk, which takes into account all appropriate safety concerns while aiming to minimize any shipping delays.

**Vessel owners and operators and local stakeholders, should be aware of the following:**

- Vessel representatives are reminded that 33 C.F.R. § 160.216 requires the owner, agent, master, operator, or person in charge of a vessel to immediately notify the nearest Coast Guard Sector whenever there is a hazardous condition aboard the vessel. An ill person on board or an unknown substance or hazardous ash, debris or residue may be indicative of a hazardous condition and should be reported.
- COTPs will evaluate each vessel individually for risk factors when determining appropriate courses of action. Vessel owners and operators of impacted vessels bound for U.S. ports should assess the following criteria for their vessel or cargo and determine if COTP notification is warranted. COTPs will consider the following factors when determining whether the vessel or cargo may constitute a risk to the port. These factors will include, but are not limited to:
  - The location of the vessel or cargo within the port of Tianjin during the time window of concern;
  - The operations that were ongoing, such as loading or discharging of cargo;
  - Whether or not any cargo bays, holds, or external doors were open;
  - The status of the cargo or containers held within cargo bays or holds within the time window of concern;
  - Whether the vessel received any visible ash, debris or residue on deck, within ventilation, in between containers, or on any other part of the ship following the explosions;
  - Whether any persons onboard have been experiencing any ill health effects subsequent to the explosions for unknown reasons, or due to exposure to substances from the explosions;
  - Whether an impacted vessel has undertaken measures to test for potentially hazardous substances including any sampling taken; and
  - Weather conditions experienced in-route.
- Representatives of impacted vessels should be prepared to demonstrate to the cognizant COTP and CBP authorities the actions that they have taken to ensure that no hazardous conditions exist onboard their vessels or with the cargo as a result of the explosions in Tianjin. Federal government experts are

currently developing guidelines for sampling testing to facilitate those efforts. That guidance will be disseminated through respective COTP as soon as possible. Vessel representatives are encouraged to keep in contact with their cognizant COTP to receive guidance in a timely manner. Industry planning and preparation as far in advance as possible will help to minimize potential delays to cargo operations.

- For any questions, please contact the cognizant Captain of the Port where your vessel or cargo will make its first port of call in the United States.

Questions regarding this bulletin should be forwarded to the Office of Commercial Vessel Compliance (CG-CVC) at **202-372-1251** or by email at [portstatecontrol@uscg.mil](mailto:portstatecontrol@uscg.mil). This bulletin is provided for informational purposes only and does not relieve vessel owners/operators from any domestic or international safety, operational or material requirement.

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