



Carefully to Carry

Container top safety

The subject of container top safety has been discussed in detail by various maritime organisations. The conclusions have brought about numerous changes in the applicable laws in a number of countries, most notably the United States of America and Japan. Both of these countries require all ships calling at their ports to comply with their legislation relating to the safety of dockworkers in the operation of loading and unloading containers.

Each of these countries has a requirement that dockworkers are able to secure containers without going on to the top of containers that are stacked more than one high, whether on the quayside or on the ship. For ships to comply with the applicable law means that the equipment for fitting and securing containers onboard the ship is operated from the deck, or possibly a safe walkway, level.

In order that containers can be safely secured, automatic or semi-automatic twistlocks need to be used and lashing rods need to be constructed such that they can be handled easily and safely and secured properly without the dockworkers having to be raised above the deck, or safe walkway, level.

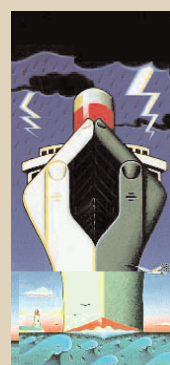
The top tier of a stack of containers needs to be secured at the top of the container and the positioning of bridge-pieces normally does this. Dockworkers do need to be positioned on the top of containers on the top tier to fit these bridge-pieces. The port or terminal normally has specialised cages fitted with fall-arrester systems to facilitate this particular operation.

All of the above arrangements for loading and unloading ships are based on the ship being alongside a pier, quay or wharf and properly secured against unwarranted movement.

These arrangements do not mean that the ship's crew can be ignorant of these operations and the special nature of the equipment as they will need to be able to operate these items of equipment in an emergency whilst the ship is at sea (SOLAS). Training in the safe operation of these pieces of equipment is an essential part of the management and running of the ship. Initial training can be carried out on shore based facilities, providing a sufficient 'mock-up' of the arrangement for stacked containers onboard can be arranged, but training in the ship environment is likely to be more instructive.

All training should be frequently practiced, in a safe environment, and the training should be reviewed after each practice session. This is essential as the requirement for automatic and semi-automatic equipment becomes more widespread in ports and terminals throughout the world.

The fact that the USA and Japan has put such legislation in place means that any ship operator trading with them must follow their rules and regulations. This does not, however, mean that every port or terminal in the world will have the same requirements. Many countries are examining their specific practices regarding dockworker safety and may not arrive at the same conclusions as



"The carrier shall properly and carefully load, handle, stow, carry, keep, care for and discharge the goods carried."

Hague Rules,
Articles iii, Rule 2

Carefully to Carry Advisory Committee

This report was produced by the Carefully to Carry Committee – the UK P&I Club's advisory committee on cargo matters. The aim of the Carefully to Carry Committee is to reduce claims through contemporaneous advice to the Club's Members through the most efficient means available.

The committee was established in 1961 and has produced many articles on cargoes that cause claims and other cargo related issues such as hold washing, cargo securing, and ventilation.

The quality of advice given has established Carefully to Carry as a key source of guidance for shipowners and ships' officers. In addition, the articles have frequently been the source of expertise in negotiations over the settlement of claims and have also been relied on in court hearings.

In 2002 all articles were revised and published in book form as well as on disk. All articles are also available to Members on the Club website. Visit the Carefully to Carry section in the Loss Prevention area of the Club website www.ukpandi.com for more information, or contact the Loss Prevention Department.

the USA or Japan, so ship operators need to be aware of the varying regulations in each port.

Because national legislators are keen to ensure that none of their countrymen are injured during the loading or unloading of a ship, does not mean that the ship's crew should consider doing any part of the job that would normally be done by dockworkers. The correct fixing and lashing of containers, irrespective of whether they are on or under deck, is a specialised job and should always be left for the specialists to do. Ship's personnel, who ultimately have the responsibility for the safe carriage of the cargo, should oversee the fixing and lashing onboard.

Any ship that does not have the particular equipment in use for a specific country's requirements should never consider trying to undertake releasing or lashing work whilst at sea, in coastal waters or manoeuvring in port limits as this would be very dangerous both for the crew and the cargo.

Despite various countries operating 'safe dockworker' principles, there should still be facilities to handle all ships that call at their ports. There should be other methods of ensuring that their dockworkers operate in a safe way, even if this means going on the tops of containers to release twistlocks (assuming that the ship has not been re-stocked with automatic or semi-automatic units). How they do this work is not the direct concern of the ship, as long as the ship is loaded or unloaded effectively.

As dockworkers are provided with appropriate safety equipment, such as fall-arrester harnesses and ancillary equipment, there is every reason to ensure that similar safety equipment is provided for ships' crews, even though this may only need to be used in an emergency. If it is considered dangerous for a dockworker to go on the top of a container stack whilst the ship is moored against a wharf without safety equipment, then it is far more dangerous for a ship's crew to do this whilst at sea, and life threatening to do so without proper safety equipment. Safety equipment is often available onboard but its use, at every opportunity is not always enforced.