



Ship Type: Container

Trade Area: Hong Kong

## Bulletin 61 - 8/98 - Thefts of Empty Reefer Containers - Hong Kong

Since December 1997 we have become aware of a series of thefts of refrigerated containers in Hong Kong. These thefts have resulted in losses to several container operators of reefer containers worth in excess of **US\$1 million**.

The Club's in-house investigation team **Signum Services** have recently completed an investigation into the thefts and we are circulating the information as widely as possible to ensure that Members suffer no further losses.

The thefts have all been perpetrated by the same person using different company names. Posing as a shipper, he has been approaching forwarding agents/owners requesting reefer containers for export cargoes. He has apparently been playing on the fact that due to the shortage of export cargoes owners are less likely to question the credentials of potential shippers.

When he is asked for proof of identity he has managed to persuade the agents to accept faxed forged details. He generally does this just prior to a weekend or at other times when the staff might be particularly busy.

The containers are delivered in Hong Kong and are immediately transhipped by land to mainland China - never to be seen again. There are reports of them being used as refrigerated storage in Southern China.

Whilst Signum Services have now identified the bogus shipper and steps are being taken to bring him to justice, we would recommend that Members take a close look at their booking systems to ensure such incidents cannot occur again.

The following points might be worth considering :-

- 1) In dealing with new customers, shipping lines should obtain sufficient detail to carry out checks on the company name, business address, business registration number and, in the case of large orders, financial status. (Signum Services can recommend companies which will undertake this service).
- 2) Particular care should be taken in cases where new customers request reefer containers:
  - (a) at unusual times e.g. just before the office closes for the weekend or a public holiday.
  - (b) when the customer is in great haste to make the booking and appears unwilling to allow time for the normal administrative processes to take place.
  - (c) when the customer constantly contacts the shipping line altering the arrangements for the return of the stuffed containers to the terminal.
- 3) The Police should be notified immediately it becomes known that a customer has provided false details in order to obtain a container.
- 4) If the customer has not returned the containers provided to him by the agreed date, then no further containers should be released to him until either the original containers have been returned to the terminal, or the reason for his failure to do so has been satisfactorily established.

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Source of Information :-

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