

CONTAINERS DISPLAYING FALSE IDENTIFICATION REFERENCES

Despite the introduction of the ISPS Code, organised criminal gangs are still focussing on weaknesses at container terminals to help them perpetrate crimes. To achieve this, they generally involve one or more of the terminal's workforce, who are not only prepared to provide essential information, but also take an active role.

A recent Signum investigation concerning containers found with false identification references, demonstrated the precision that criminals apply when planning how to penetrate a terminal or shipping line's defence system. It was established that the alteration to these containers played an essential part of an elaborate smuggling syndicate operation incorporating three countries X, Y and Z. The smugglers aim was to move contraband goods from country X to country Y.

Members of the syndicate located in country X arranged for a carrier to ship a container, allegedly laden with a cheap cargo, to country Y for transshipment to a syndicate receiver in country Z. The container had in fact been loaded with contraband cargo. Meanwhile, in country Y, other members were in possession of a similar container that had been stripped of all its identification markings, including the CSC plate and loaded with the cargo that should have been in the container shipped from country X.

On receiving the details of the container in country X, its identification reference was placed on to their container by the use of self-adhesive letters and numbers. This meant that there were two containers in existence with the same identical markings. A forged CSC plate was also attached showing the false identification reference, as was a stolen carrier's seal.

On the arrival of the contraband cargo, the container was placed in the general stacking area to await transshipment to country Z. Once in place, an employee at the terminal who had access to their computerised container movement system, obtained its location and inputted into the system the position where the other container was to be stacked. These details were then forwarded to the smugglers so that their container could be immediately delivered to the terminal.

As the criminals were aware of a weakness in the terminal security procedures and the two allotted container stacking positions, they were able to get the container into the terminal without producing any documents, have it off loaded and the container with the contraband goods collected.

Having to obtain customs clearance to leave the terminal, a fraudulent release note was produced to secure its exit. The contraband cargo was then removed with the container being stripped of its identity to await use in another smuggling operation.

The container with the correct cargo, but incorrect seal was shipped to their person in country Z. On its receipt the cargo was placed in another container and shipped back to their people in country Y, so that it could again be used in another one of their operations. The empty container with the false identification reference was returned to the carrier.

This was a well planned smuggling operation that had been very successful until the involvement of Signum. It is understood that a similar smuggling operation has been discovered in another part of the world from where this one occurred.

To try and prevent such incidents, a quick means of verifying if it is a rogue container is to check the CSC plate or the right side door base corner fitting, where the correct container reference number should be engraved.

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