

# CONTAINER SECURITY

The introduction of the ISPS Code has aroused an interest regarding the effect it will have in deterring criminal involvement in container crime.

There can be no doubt that the improved security recommendations focussing on the terrorist issue, particularly at ports and terminals, should provide a securer internal environment. This is likely to lead criminals to concentrate their activities away from these locations to areas where there is less security. However, there will still be those who will use these locations to carry out their crime.

In recent times, a percentage of Signum's work has focussed on containers that have traversed ports and terminals, either in a tampered condition or with cargo different to that shown on the Bill of Lading and Manifest.

When these instances have come to light, the method used to gain access to the container has tended to depend on the level of security in place at the port or terminal on acceptance of the container.

For instance, if the procedure only requires verification that a seal is attached, without checking its details or that it has been tampered with, will more than likely result in the seal being removed and then re-fixed or another attached.

## **For example:**

Signum was asked to enquire into a number of incidents that had occurred on the same route concerning cargo shortage. From the point of loading, it was discovered there was no physical check or requirement by any party to confirm that the correct seal as placed on the container and shown on the Bill of Lading was in situ during its journey.

Only when reaching the consignee's address was a check undertaken and when an incorrect seal was found to be attached, a cargo shortage was identified. Checking the details of the replaced seals provided information as to the likely location of the thefts.

Where a tighter checking procedure exists, attention focusses on the container doors and their locking mechanism. Signum has seen an increase in this type of attack, confirming the criminals' awareness that doors and locking mechanism are very rarely checked.

It is not unusual, when this method of entry has failed to be identified, for a container to be returned into circulation with a defective locking system.

**For example:**

Ten containers, said to be laden with coffee, arrived at various European ports with their seals intact. On reaching their destination and being opened, they were found to be laden with building material. Signum was asked to enquire into these losses.

Examination of the containers ascertained that entry had been gained by removing the rivet of the inner locking bar handle hub on the outer door. This enabled the cargo to be removed and substituted with the mentioned material. The locking bar handle was replaced into the hub and secured with a bolt.

On visiting the source of the shipments, the investigator found that there was a strict security presence when a container was loaded. The availability of a computer-operated weighbridge at the point of loading provided an accurate weight of each consignment.

On the container's arrival at the terminal the complete unit was weighed with the truck and trailer being reweighed on departure. This provided a weight comparison with that recorded at the shipper's premises, which unfortunately no one checked.

Before being loaded onto a ship, each container had its seal physically checked in addition to its details.

When comparing the two weight charts for each of these containers, the investigator established that they were somewhat heavier on their arrival at the terminal, than when they left the shipper's premises.

Discussions with the terminal staff revealed that their instructions were to check the seal security, which to them indicated that the container was intact. They were unaware that a container door could be opened without interfering with the seal. Had this been part of their checking procedure they would probably have noticed the interference to the locking mechanism and checking the container's weight would have prevented the thefts from taking place between the shipper's premises and the terminal.

Often an attack on a container occurs after it has left a port or terminal and is carried out in such a manner to make it seem that the loss happened prior to the transport driver collecting the container.

**For example:**

Signum was asked to investigate a shortage of pallets of wine shipped in the containers from the USA to the UK, from where they were delivered to two different consignees. When the containers were opened a shortage was found.

Enquiries at the receiving port showed that two different lorry drivers had collected the containers and on arrival at the out-gate, the carrier's seal was found to be missing. A replacement seal was attached to each container prior to it leaving the port.

On arrival at the consignee's premises the replaced seal was intact, but when opened a shortage was found. This gave the appearance that the thefts must have occurred prior to the driver's collection from the port.

Enquiries indicated that it was extremely unlikely that this loss had occurred within the port area or whilst in the USA.

The investigator was made aware of two other similar losses of wine and decided that the four containers, which were by then located elsewhere, should be examined. When each of the four containers was examined, the rear of the rivet holding the inner locking bar handle of the outer door had been removed. This allowed the doors to be opened without disturbing the seal. After the cargo had been removed the rivet had been glued back into position to disguise the fact that the theft had occurred after the container had left the port.

The investigator established that a group of truck drivers had been involved in stealing cargo from these and other containers by the mentioned method after removing the original seal at the port, with the intention to pass the responsibility on to other parties.

There are also occasions when a shipper does not place the correct cargo into a container with the intention of committing a fraud.

**For example:**

Signum was asked to enquire into two matters where containers had been found to be in a secure condition, but laden with different cargo to that described in the Bill of Lading.

1. The first matter related to a number of containers said to contain cigarettes. After two containers had arrived at their destination they were found to contain bricks.

An investigator was asked to be present when Customs opened two further containers. An examination of the exterior of these two containers found them to be in a sound condition with no evidence of tampering. On opening them, each was found to be laden with bricks.

The bricks had the appearance of a general type of house brick produced in the country from where the containers had been shipped. With the shipper and haulier declining to be interviewed, the matter was notified to the appropriate authorities.

In this instance, the material found inside the containers was of a lesser value than that shown on the Bill of Lading. The reverse applied in the next incident.

2. A number of containers said to laden with empty CD cases were shipped to various consignees in West Africa. The containers on discharge in South Africa for onward shipment to their destination showed no sign of tampering. When opened by Customs they were found to be laden with a motor car, CD's and DVD's.

Signum's assistance was sought to enquire into the circumstances as to how the containers came to be so loaded.

Enquiries established that each container had been correctly sealed at the port of shipment. The forwarders who arranged the shipments declined to provide information concerning the shippers or hauliers. Despite the lack of cooperation, the investigator was able to ascertain the nationality of the persons involved in these illegal shipments.

It is important when encountering these types of incidents that all parts of the removed seal(s), whether original or not, are retained. A thorough examination of the container doors and its locking mechanism is undertaken and signs of replaced bolts, rivets or repainted areas, should be recorded and if possible, photographed. If the cargo has been substituted with another material, it should be preserved for examination as often it provides an indication as to where the theft took place.

Interference to a seal or the door locking mechanism is not a new phenomenon, it has been happening for years. The reason it has become more prevalent in recent times is due to the new initiatives on container security, which has caused criminals to use these methods, knowing that they will more than likely avoid detection at ports and terminals.

Currently there are various initiatives with regards to container security. Many see high tech solutions as the way forward to provide better security. Improvements to the standard and type of seal used is also under review.

Until these new initiatives come into effect, the attachment of a good quality cable seal or other similar device that passes around the two inner upright locking bars on the container doors, will enhance its security. Signum investigators are always available to provide help, should a member encounter such problems.

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