

Bulletin 398 - 01/05 – Containerised Stowaways to North America

We have received reliable information from our correspondent in Vancouver by way of Canadian Immigration authorities, that there will be a significant increase in stowaways in containers from South East Asia, particularly South China and Hong Kong, to destinations in North America. This has been confirmed by incidents over recent months but is not a new problem, rather a recurrence of the events of 1999 and 2000 when containerised shipments' of stowaways were the subject of a number of the Association's Loss Prevention Bulletins (see [Loss Prevention Bulletin 118](#)).

The most recent incident involving a Member vessel occurred in Southern California in which two sealed containers carrying the same security seal number were loaded in Shekou, China. One container was marked clothing and the other marked plastic toys. They actually contained a total of 32 stowaways from China. The containers were well equipped with food, water, a latrine, adequate winter clothing, fans and rope ladders. The containers had trap doors cut into the sides and bottoms, which appeared to be simple repairs. In fact, the trap doors were tack-welded and the stowaways were provided with hammers to break out of the containers at their destination.

An investigation into the shipper and consignee are underway. There is no indication that the vessel officers or crew were complicit in transporting the stowaways. Nevertheless, penalties and fines will likely be assessed.

Similar incidents occurred in May 2004 in which a total of 10 stowaways from Fujian Province in China travelled to Pusan, Korea. Some of the stowaways waited in South Korea between eight months to one year for a ship to North America. They stowed away on two different Members' ships and in one instance, the stowaways were discovered by the crew in the void space above the fore peak tank top prior to the ship's arrival in the U.S.

Members are advised to scrupulously adhere to their vessel security plans while in port and, if necessary increase security while in ports in North East Asia using only reputable, bonded security companies well known to government officials and familiar with stowaway issues. Members are also advised to fully comply with the requirements of the ISPS Code and the MTSA 2002/2004. Members are also cautioned to be on the look out for suspicious repairs or air holes drilled into containers as well as for peculiar odours coming from containers or other potential hiding spaces on board.

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*Images: the escape hatch looking like a repair, once opened and the gear/conditions inside.
Note the fans hanging from the ceiling of the container.*

