



Ship Type: Container

Trade Area: United Kingdom

Bulletin 447 - 01/06 - Theft of Container Cargo - United Kingdom

It is understood that there is a shortage of drivers to meet the demand for transporting cargo by road within the UK. Generally, carriers will arrange for an acceptable haulier to undertake their UK inland transport service, although problems often occur when the haulier employs an unsuitable driver, especially one who is self-employed, as investigators of Signum Services Ltd recently found out when investigating two cases of alleged container cargo shortage.

In the first incident a carrier entered into a contract with a haulage operator for the haulier to regularly transport some of the carrier's laden containers within the UK. To meet these requirements, the haulier subcontracted to two self-employed drivers, solely because they were able to drive his tractor units.

Soon after the commencement of the contract, the carrier received complaints that containers were being delivered with their seals intact, but with a shortage of contents. Signum was asked to enquire into the haulier's activities since the same tractor unit and driver had been involved with each delivery.

An examination of each container revealed that the upper rivet of one of the seal clamps on the right door had been removed, thereby enabling the door to be opened without breaking the original seal. A bolt and nut had replaced the rivet to disguise the method of entry.

Although the tractor unit tachographs were not available, the time taken on each journey far exceeded the normal acceptable time period. It was also found that the self-employed driver was disqualified from driving and totally unsuitable for this type of employment. The operator's naivety and poor recruitment procedure when employing this person was disconcerting, and has resulted in his operator's licence being revoked.

A similar problem occurred when a haulage operator employed a driver solely on the presentation of a driving licence and immediately allowed him to transport high value export containerised cargo to a UK port. Signum was asked to investigate the situation after three such containers reached their overseas destinations in an apparently secure condition, the seal details corresponding with that on the bill of lading, but with the cargo missing.

Video footage showed that the containers had been correctly loaded, but had been secured with a different seal to that shown on the bill of lading. Enquiries revealed that the delivery paperwork given to the driver for presentation to the carrier's agent at the port, in order to prepare the bill of lading, had been altered to show a different seal reference. This was subsequently recorded on to the bill of lading. Although the tachographs were not available, the time taken to undertake each of the deliveries to the port exceeded the acceptable journey time.

These incidents emphasise the importance of carriers ensuring that hauliers obtain acceptable credentials when appointing self-employed drivers; otherwise there could be serious repercussions.

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