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Subject: When a Vessel Arrives at China with Crew Members Tested Positive to Covid-19

The past few weeks have seen a spike of cases where vessels arrive at China with newly changed crewmembers, among whom some have been found positive to COVID-19 tests.

Background

Currently in most Chinese ports, local Customs Authority will conduct COVID-19 tests during quarantine inspections to crew members who have signed on within the last 14 days. In some cases, they may also conduct tests to other crew members which they consider may have relatively high risks in terms of COVID-19 taking into consideration of various factors such as the crew's temperature record. If the tests results are negative, then the vessel will be allowed for cargo operation and to depart in the normal manner. In case the test result of any crew member is positive, then the vessel may be faced with great problems or extensive delay.

Procedures

Such cases have been observed from north to south along the Chinese coast and the local authorities are taking different approaches. Generally speaking, the local governments (instead of maritime authorities) will dominate the procedures of handling such situation and take a very prudent or stringent approach in terms of epidemic control.

At some ports, if any of the crew members are found positive to COVID-19 tests, the local customs authority will arrange testing to all the other crewmembers on board to confirm the range or seriousness of the infection. Usually these tests will be taken twice to increase

accuracy of the results. Before the testing results of all crewmembers are available, no cargo operation will be allowed. Once the results are known, the local authorities will arrange to send the positive crewmembers to a designated hospital ashore for medical treatment and arrange disinfection of the ship. After preventive measures have been taken to the satisfaction of the authorities, the vessel may be allowed to proceed with cargo operation and then depart accordingly. The disembarked crew members will have to stay in the hospital until they can be discharged according to medical standard and then be repatriated to their home country. In case the vessel becomes undermanned because of disembarkation of the infected crew members, she either needs to obtain an exemption from her flag state or arrange replacement crew members from China.

However, in some other ports, owners may find themselves in greater trouble. We have seen a few ports insisted the vessel be quarantined at anchorage for 14 days since disembarkation of the infected crew member/s before she can be allowed to berth and start cargo operation. Some port authorities may hinder the vessel's departure if the infected crew members cannot be tested negative again before the vessel is due to depart. It is also likely that authorities will ask the infected crew member to be sent back to the vessel, instead of being repatriated, if his test result turns negative after medical treatment.

In some smaller ports, the authorities tend to persuade owners to deviate and disembark the crewmembers at their home country or other convenient ports before the vessel returns to China.

Expenses and losses

Needless to say, if the above situation happens, the vessel is faced with delay to different extents and various costs and losses will be incurred.

At the moment, usually the following expenses will be incurred: medical expenses, traffic, accommodation and repatriation cost of the infected crew member, vessel's disinfection costs, agency charge, etc.

Apart from the above, if the vessel is staying at berth without cargo operation, the terminal may charge the non-production berthing fee at the rate of RMB0.15 per hour per ship's net ton.

In some of these cases, port authorities require the crew members to stay in their cabins and request assistance from shore personnel with opening and closing of hatch covers,

adjusting of and casting off mooring rope, etc. which may incur additional fees by the terminal. Furthermore, at some ports, extra pilotage fee may be charged for the special risks.

Furthermore, arranging replacement crew members, if it becomes necessary, may also take some time.

Impact

With the increasing number of cases of this kind, local authorities at some ports have strengthened epidemic control measures, such as requiring suspected high-risk vessels to receive customs inspection at anchorage before berthing, restricting shore personnel's boarding, etc.

Suggestions

In view of the potential great trouble and delay, owners are suggested to make careful arrangements regarding joining crew's COVID-19 tests, in order to avoid the risk that signing-on crew members are actually COVID-19 positive.

We hope the above assists. If you have any query, please feel free to contact us at any time.

Best regards,

Oasis P&I Services Company Limited