



Friday 13 November 2009

Bulletin 664 - 11/09 - Forged Bills of Lading - West Africa

The Association would like to inform its Members about the problems encountered with forged Bills of Lading in West Africa. Following recent investigations it was revealed that the problem is quite wide-spread and forged bills are presented regularly.

Forged bills often pass the scrutiny of clerks working in agent's offices who consequently issue 'Release Orders', enabling the cargo (usually containers) to be obtained from the terminal. Subsequent investigation and close examination of forged bills have shown various differences which might have been noticed had they been examined closely, or compared with genuine bills or the manifest in question.

Most of the forged bills presented in the past have been produced by back street printers and the printing is often poor quality. The following points highlight the common problems that were encountered when investigating this problem.



- In some instances the shipping line motif has not been reproduced correctly or there have been spelling mistakes.
- Words have been missing from the standard print on the front of the form, where details of a particular shipment should be placed.
- Sometimes in the right hand, top corner, where the bill of lading number is entered, the layout of the paragraphs has been different from those on a genuine form.
- On the rear of the form, whole paragraphs relating to the conditions have been found missing and again the layout has been slightly different from the genuine article.
- Sometimes the colour of the print on the form is either lighter or darker than the original.
- On some forms, there is a water mark which in the case of forgeries, is usually missing.
- The paper used in creating forged blanks is often of a different texture from the genuine article.
- The details of the shipment entered on the front of the bill have been typed on the form in slightly different positions (maybe only a millimetre or two) within the relevant box.

- In some cases the shipment details have been copied incorrectly and, on one occasion, '76 used motor cycles' was typed on the forgery as opposed to '67 used motor cycles' on the original.

The main problem for the shipping agent's clerk is that he doesn't have a sample of the original with which to compare the bill being surrendered to him, or in the case of the shipment details and their position on the bill, a copy of the actual genuine bill to compare the layout. This could possibly be rectified within the agent's office if a replica of the genuine article can somehow be furnished to the agent. Care has to be taken with this, however, in case a corrupt member of staff uses the genuine bill to ensure that the forgery is accurately made.

With respect to the accuracy of the shipment details, these can be checked against the manifest which will have been sent in hard copy or electronically, the details shown on the manifest being exactly as those on the genuine bill of lading.

Source of information: Signum Services
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