



Ship Type: Container

Trade Area: Worldwide

Bulletin 40 - 03/98 - Container Seal Integrity ex United Kingdom

Seal problems remain current. Recently we have had the experience of a container shipped from the UK to Jeddah where on opening the contents were found to have been stolen. The correct bolt seal was in place with no signs of tampering and with no damage to the seal brackets, door hinges or container fastenings. The container had been shipped from the Freightliner depot in Lancashire to Southampton, then by mainline carrier to Jeddah, and showed no signs whatsoever of interference. Theft during transit seemed highly improbable leaving the owners perplexed as to how the cargo could possibly have disappeared.

Investigations by Signum, the Club's in-house investigators, have revealed a frighteningly simple scam enabling such thefts to occur with impunity.

Carriers should check their systems/procedures to see if similar loopholes exist.

Carrier A contracts to carry shipper B's cargo. The carrier contracts with a regular haulier to take an empty container to the shipper for loading. The regular haulier is reliable and trustworthy - but unfortunately he is very busy and has to contract out to a third party haulier. Because the regular haulier is well trusted the line gives him the seal to be used (in this case a bolt seal). This is passed on to the sub contractor (who turns out to be not so reliable). Armed with the seal number he obtains, apparently with ease, a metal strip seal. This seal, again with ease, is stamped with the bolt seal number.

The (not so reliable) sub contractor arrives at the shipper's premises. The shipper loads the cargo, the sub contractor hands over the metal strip seal to the shipper who seals the container and signs all the paperwork.

The container is sealed, all the paperwork is correct; everyone is happy.

The (not so reliable) sub contractor now proceeds to a point where the cargo can be discharged illicitly from the container. The bogus strip seal is dispensed with. In the case in question the container was emptied, closed and then resealed with the original bolt seal. The container presumably arrived at the terminal as normal. The seal was recorded as intact and in compliance with the paperwork and presumably accepted with no remark. As far as the terminal and carrier were concerned they had a container which complied with all their criteria. Only several weeks later, at time of receipt by the receiver, did it become apparent that the cargo had mysteriously disappeared.

We are hopeful of a good result in this case, thanks to the effort of Signum Services. We wonder though how many other similar cases have remained unsolved?

Recommendations

Instruct principal hauliers to record seal number and type on collection orders.

Encourage shippers to attach their own seals in addition to the carriers seal.

Ensure hauliers are given time limits to deliver and collect containers.

Make sure systems are in place to check pick up and delivery times.

Remember tachographs can be a useful tool for checking and authenticating hauliers' stories if delays are reported.

Avoid the use of strip seals if at all possible.

Remind shippers/line employees that seals are not anti-theft devices.

Source of Information: Mike Newstead through Liam Gillespie (Signum Services)