

Loss Prevention Bulletin

Ship Type: All Trade Area: All

Bulletin 141 - 5/00 – The Smuggling of Stowaways

Bulletins 118 – 11/99 Smuggling of Chinese Citizens and 123 – 1/00 Chinese Stowaways – Canada/USA highlighted the development of organised smuggling of Chinese citizens into North America. Recent incidents have involved the use of containers and enquiries by the investigative organisation Signum Services Ltd have given the Association an insight into the methods being employed by the criminal organisations responsible.

New information is now available on the very real threat of sustained attempts to smuggle stowaways in containers and ships in general. Accordingly, the Association has taken the opportunity to revise its loss prevention advice for all categories of ships. The suggestions made within this bulletin will assist ship operators and their masters to develop their own procedures aimed at reducing the opportunities for stowaways to be smuggled on board ship or by means of containers.

The Association will continue to review the situation and issue further guidance when appropriate.

(A) Preventative Measures

(1) All Trades

- ◆ While in port accommodation doors should be locked or guarded
- ◆ A crew member must always be on duty on the gangway tallying all persons boarding and disembarking.
- ◆ Stevedore companies should be asked before operations begin how many stevedores will be working and stevedores should be required to access the ship only by the gangway. Consideration should be given to the easy identification of authorised personnel. One way in which this can be achieved is to issue coloured vests or perhaps arm bands to members of the stevedore team. These should be returned and counted at the end of the shift. Different colours should be used in order to prevent copying. Those not wearing the appropriately coloured article can be assumed to be an unauthorised visitor.
- ◆ Watchmen should be vigilant for boarders climbing the fore and aft mooring ropes and over the rails from the quayside at low water, or by small boat, especially during the night.
- ◆ Specific instructions should be given to watchmen to allow on board only people required for the ship's business, such as stevedores and officials. Sellers of services or goods should not be permitted.
- ◆ Before departure the vessel should be searched thoroughly with particular attention to dark and unlikely places, including areas apparently locked.

(2) Container Trades

(a) Prior to terminal

- ◆ Carriers are recommended to make further enquiries and take extra precautions at the time shipments are booked.

Particular attention should be paid to:

- ◆ Trade patterns which have been the subject of past problems.
- ◆ Previously unknown shippers; company searches may be appropriate.
- ◆ New trading areas.
- ◆ Requests for empty containers to be delivered to insecure areas.
- ◆ Loaded containers collected from insecure areas.
- ◆ Open top containers, which should be inspected prior to acceptance.
- ◆ Lightweight shipments.
- ◆ Shipments in reefer containers set at relatively high temperatures.

(b) Terminal (prior to loading)

- ◆ In appropriate areas co-operation should be sought from local immigration authorities; their experience may be an essential asset.
- ◆ Carriers should emphasise to terminal operators the need for dialogue and co-operation in combating the ease with which stowaways are able to access containers due for shipment.
- ◆ Any containers presented for loading with no seals, faulty or tampered seals, should be opened and checked before being resealed.
- ◆ All reefer containers with settings above, say, 10 degrees Centigrade, should be opened and checked for stowaways.
- ◆ All open top containers should be inspected.
- ◆ Particular attention should be given to any containers with signs of recent repair, repainting etc.
- ◆ Particular attention should be paid to containers that arrive in the terminal late, after the cut-off period and shortly before vessel loading commences. This tactic might be used to reduce the opportunity for detection and would also reduce stowaways' length of confinement.
- ◆ Consider the deployment of CO2 detectors, heat detectors, sniffer dogs and/or heartbeat detectors. Methods of detection will vary from terminal to terminal. Agreements should be sought with each operator.
- ◆ Pay particular attention to any containers received from outside locations and especially from insecure or uncontrolled areas.
- ◆ Containers for which obvious weight discrepancies exist should be identified and if necessary, searched.

(c) After Loading

- ◆ On container ships, searches of empty spaces and deck vigilance prior to departure is necessary as with all other types of vessels. When appropriate, consider building time into the vessel's schedule to enable this to take place.
- ◆ Whenever possible it may be prudent to have men in the hatch when hatchcovers are replaced as stowaways have been known to conceal themselves in the hatch cover structure when stowed ashore.
- ◆ Routine crew security and safety tours of the vessel should be undertaken and noted regularly in the vessel deck log.

(B) Steps to be taken after a stowaway has been detected

(1) All Trades

- ◆ Many stowaways give themselves up once the vessel is at sea, often by making a loud noise. For a vessel discovering stowaways, the priority is for them to be disembarked at the next port of call. The master should therefore immediately inform the owners and the Club or Club Correspondent so that International formalities can be completed as soon as possible.
- ◆ A Master should, if possible, immediately:
 - ◆ Search the area where the stowaway was found for concealed documents etc.
 - ◆ Search the stowaways clothing.
 - ◆ Interview the stowaway and immediately advise the Member and the agents at the next port of call of the following:
 - (a) Port of embarkation.
 - (b) Details of documents held.
 - (c) Name.
 - (d) Date and place of birth.
 - (e) Address.
 - (f) Nationality.
- ◆ Photographs should be taken of the stowaways in order to speed the acquisition of travel documents. If digital photography is available it may be possible to e-mail transfer the images to the agent or the Club correspondent at the ship's next port of call, thereby saving time with the necessary formalities.
- ◆ The stowaways should be kept secure at all times, particularly when the ship is in port.
- ◆ While the stowaway is on board, the Master should not provide work for him and the stowaway should not be signed on to the Ship's Articles.
- ◆ The Member should immediately advise the Club of the above, together with:
 - (a) Full itinerary.
 - (b) Details of agents at future ports of call.
 - (c) Details of ship's radio/fax/telex.

- ◆ The Club will agree a course of action with the Member and instruct local Correspondents where necessary.
- ◆ Masters should always bear in mind that stowaways frequently give false details in order to delay their removal from the ship. If the Master believes that the stowaway is not telling the truth, he should so report.

(2) Container Trades

- ◆ Every situation must be examined in its own right, with major considerations being the safety of the vessel and crew, and the preservation of life.
- ◆ On discovering stowaways within containers, review the stow position and accessibility.
- ◆ Inform vessel operations of the known facts, with container number, stow position and load port, seeking directions.
- ◆ Urgent attempts must be made to communicate with the stowaways (consider tape recorded messages in various languages).
- ◆ Assess the situation. How many stowaways? What nationality? Try to determine their health. Do they present a threat to the vessel and crew? Do they require food and water? Consider drilling holes in the container to provide these, if feasible.
- ◆ Taking into consideration the safety of the ship and crew, as well as the stowaways, should the vessel divert? (Factors to be considered will include time since departure from load port, estimated time of arrival at destination, time to the nearest suitable port if ship diverts, can that port cater for the vessel and provide fast access to the container?).
- ◆ Liaise closely with owners/carriers P & I Club. The Master should not be expected to carry the entire burden. Each case must be reviewed on its own merits and decisions taken jointly.
- ◆ If the stowaways can be released from the container, are there sufficient crew to safely supervise them in a secure area?

No guidelines issued in advance can hope to cover all situations. In rare instances stowaways could be armed or be capable of violence towards the crew, or even outnumber the crew. The master in close liaison with the shipowner and the P&I Club will need to consider the safety of the ship and crew as well as the health and well-being of the stowaways and achieve a balance of interests.

Source of Information : Graham Daines (Claims Technical Director)