UK P&I CLUB

Ship Type: All **Trade Area: Worldwide**

Bulletin 296 - 04/03 - Dangers of Fumigants in Containers

We have recently been reminded of the dangers of working with containers under fumigation. All containers that are or have been fumigated should be marked 'Under Fumigation'. It has come to the Club's attention that on occasion this is not being done. Failure to warn of fumigation can lead to a person being permanently disabled or severely injured as a result of contact with residual fumigants.

In the UK, entry into containers is subject to the Confined Space Regulations 1997 (Statutory Instrument 1997 no 1713, available on website below). Under these regulations the company must establish a safe system of work and of risk assessment.

Fumigants are used to protect foodstuffs from rodents, insects, mould and fungi, but can also be used to prevent the carriage of the above between countries. There is therefore the potential for any container to be fumigated. There are at least nine different types of fumigant. Those most commonly used in containers are phosphine, sulphuryl fluoride and methyl bromide.

These fumigants are potentially fatal to humans. Phosphine is readily absorbed by inhalation and through the gastrointestinal tract, but not through the skin. Symptoms following inhalation at low levels include headache, weakness, faintness and pains in the chest etc. At high levels nausea, vomiting and pulmonary oedema occur. Contact with methyl bromide through inhalation and absorption through the skin can cause damage to the brain, nervous system, skin, lungs and possibly kidneys.

We have been advised that during a recent study in Rotterdam, 21% of containers out of 303 random container units examined were found to contain methyl bromide, formaldehyde and phosphine, and of these only three units displayed the relevant warning label.

We advise all Members to ensure that the procedures for warning of fumigation and for entry into confined spaces are adhered to and to advise staff of the dangers if these procedures are not followed.

Source of information: Loss Prevention Dept
www.HMSO.gov.uk