



Ship Type: Bulk carrier      Trade Area: Romania

## Bulletin 222 - 12/01 - Grain Export Problems - Romania

Following recent reports of contaminated cargoes of grain coming out of Romania the Club's correspondents there have recently advised us of the following practices commonly seen in local ports which Members should be aware of:

- Large quantities of grain, especially at the start of the export season, are only naturally dried or shipped directly from the harvesting fields. Grains vary widely in appearance – not necessarily due to variety/specie and/or co-mingling of different varieties, but owing more to the harvesting conditions and regional environmental factors. The appearance of grains having the same commercial description can be misleading if not properly assessed. To clarify, *milling wheat* shipped from the north-eastern regions of Romania is different in appearance – even though it contains the same variety of wheat to shipments from other Romanian regions or even neighbouring countries.
- Blending to provide a uniform shipment is not always carried out in silos or other controlled environments, but usually on loading.
- The conveyances used inland are usually only superficially inspected and passed as being fit for grain transportation. A thorough inspection would find many of them unfit due to a lack of cleanliness and/or weather/watertightness.
  - Quite frequently, grain contains cardboard, hardboard, plastic sheeting and even items of clothing used to plug leaks in trucks. These materials are rarely removed before the grain reaches the port.
  - A large number of barges in use have been in service in excess of 40 years – commonly leaking, particularly in or around the bilges, keel plate and hatchlids, largely due to a lack of or insufficient repairs.
- Cargo handling equipment – grabs, conveyors, trucks, etc. – being used for cargoes other than grain (chemicals, coal, etc.) is not always adequately cleaned prior to being used for grain. The equipment is often limited, old and generally poorly maintained.
- From recent experience, 86 cases in 100 showed that cargo surveyors did not inspect grain-handling equipment before loading commenced, or after loading breaks – particularly after periods of wet weather.
- There is competition between a few W.European cargo-surveying companies, to assign work to local surveyors at minimum cost. Unqualified surveyors of questionable integrity are frequently engaged, whose driving force appears to be accepting as much cargo as possible due to their fees being rated on in-take tonnage. Some surveyors engaged have been found to be acting for more than one party - often conflicting interests - under different names.
- Deficiencies in cargo condition assessment and suitability of methods of conveyance are common, particularly when the same surveying company is employed for survey at both inland and loading ports. Common methods of disguising quality include:
  - Keeping barges out of sight of the shipowners' appointed surveyors
  - Limiting access of the shipowners' surveyor to warehouses, railcars, barges, trucks, etc.
  - Bringing barges alongside at night and keeping them poorly lit
  - Double-banking barges outboard of floating cranes at night, making visual inspection difficult
  - Mixing grain between barges with the aim of dispersing bad grain with good, particularly after a barge has failed an earlier inspection – often carried out upstream of the locks or in anchorages or other "restricted" areas – out of sight and without the knowledge of shipowners' surveyor, prior to being re-presented for loading
  - Loading sound cargo on top of bad cargo in barges and on board ship
- A reduction in the number of grab-cranes available for loading and/or a sudden rise in loading rate (particularly at night) and/or the rapid replacement of defective grain without a significant disruption to other loading would all be indicative that the dressing of bad grain with good was happening.
- Sound cargo is invariably the last loaded prior to presenting shipping documents for the Master's signature.
- During the winter season, the amount of cargo suitable for shipping and that which would be incompatible with the signing of a clean bill of lading can be as high as 50% of that presented to the ship.

- Sampling of grain at Constantza - including South Agigea - and other Romanian ports is customarily carried out without observing internationally recognised or accepted standards and procedures for grain being shipped at sea, and samples may be drawn from “standard” batches of 500mt or smaller.
- “Temporary” storage of grain in the open, directly on the quayside or infrequently on tarpaulins, customarily in amounts intended to be handled in an 8-hour shift is common, as well as grain exposed to the elements either on open trucks/wagons, etc. and in sheds under a leaking roof.

Members are advised to appoint their own, reputable cargo surveyors, ensuring that they are aware of the potential problems that exist in Romanian ports. If appointing local surveyors themselves, the Member is advised to ensure that they are qualified agronomists and/or approved by, or are a member of the various grain boards – GAFTA, etc. The Club’s correspondents can assist with this if required.

Many traders refuse to allow the Master to clause mate’s receipts and/or the bill of lading. Masters are advised to be aware of the apparent quality of the grain being loaded into his ship, and to clause the relevant documentation. If that fails, he should reject any cargo that does not meet the required specifications. To stand a chance of claused bills being accepted, the Master must be able to show that he has used a 24-hour continuous watch on incoming grain by *competent observers at a minimum of 2 locations – the nearest cargo handling point to the vessel and at each working hatch*, to justify his claims.

For more information, please contact UK P&I Club Loss Prevention Department.

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