



THE REPUBLIC OF LIBERIA

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Office of
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MARITIME SECURITY ADVISORY - 06/2011

Subj: Risks Associated with Drug Trafficking in Ports of Venezuela, Colombia and Ecuador, as well as the Caribbean

Dear Shipowner/Operator:

The purpose of this Advisory is to alert Ship-owners and Operators and your Master's to the ongoing problem of narcotics trafficking at ports in Venezuela, Colombia and Ecuador, as well as the Caribbean, the risks this poses to your vessels and crews and recommended measures to prevent similar incidents occurring. In some cases drugs are being hidden in capsules attached to the hull or placed inside cavities in the vessels rudder trunk upon the vessels arrival are in port without the knowledge of the vessels crew. In Venezuela, there have been a number of cases that have resulted seafarers being convicted and sentenced to substantial prison terms of 8-9 years without any obvious link being established between the activities of the crew and the presence of the drugs on board the vessel. Vessels and their cargo have also been confiscated by the courts.

General

Drug smuggling constitutes a very serious crime almost anywhere in the world. Affected parties can expect extensive investigations, interrogation, detention and possibly criminal prosecution, conviction and imprisonment. Moreover, assets may be seized as security for hefty fines and penalties and ultimately confiscated and/or sold. The mere presence of drugs onboard a vessel has in the great majority of cases resulted in the detention of the vessel and crew and charges being brought against individual crewmembers.

Recently there has been an increase in the number of reported drug detection incidents involving merchant ships calling at ports in Venezuela, Colombia and Ecuador, as well as the Caribbean. It is believed that the latter is increasingly being used as a staging post for drug trafficking, with no shortage of volunteers due to the decline in traditional industries. It is suspected that the drugs were bound for the US, Europe and/or Russia.

Measures to prevent drug smuggling

The general aim in all instances is to prevent the illegal substances from being hidden inside cavities in the vessels rudder trunk or attached to external parts of the vessels hull in the first place. The following are some general guidelines for precautionary measures to be taken before entry into port, whilst in port and after departure.

Before entry into a port

- Install physical barriers in the rudder trunk or other cavities in the hull to deter their use to hide drugs.
- Crew going ashore should be informed of the risk that possible drug traffickers may seek to befriend them in order to achieve their co-operation to smuggle drugs. The crew must understand that, this could be potentially dangerous for themselves, their families, fellow crewmembers etc. Moreover, local authorities are likely to act forcefully against any crewmember that is considered to be associated with drug traffickers.
- Warning posters describing the risks involved in the carriage of drugs should be clearly displayed at the point of the entry/exit to the vessel and within the accommodation areas.
- The ship should keep accurate records of all activities observed and the actions taken by local authorities, stevedores and other shore-based personnel and crew before entry into port, during the stay and immediately after departure.

In port or at anchor

- The master and crew must take all possible precautions to limit access to the vessel and monitor the surrounding area adjacent to the vessel whilst in port. Individuals, who have no legitimate requirement for being onboard, must not be allowed onboard. The crew should keep a log at the point of entry/exit, and the Master and/or SSO should be informed if the watch is uncertain as to whether an individual has legitimate reasons to be onboard.
- A permanent watchman should be present in areas where stevedores or repair technicians are working onboard the ship. During hours of darkness all areas should be well lit in order to facilitate visual monitoring of activities. Any suspicious activities conducted by third parties on board should be reported to the Master/SSO. Attention should be paid to small boats approaching the ship and any suspicious activity in the vicinity of the ship which may warrant further investigation. The use of a searchlight during the hours of darkness should be considered.
- The crew should perform regular shipboard inspections throughout the duration of the port call. In ports particularly prone to drug smuggling, it should be considered to employ additional security guards from an approved supplier. When broken/missing seals for compartments, lockers, containers etc., are discovered an investigation should be conducted and if nothing is found the seals should be replaced by the crew. A record should be made in the logbook together with a note of the outcome of the investigation/search and the relevant seal numbers.

- Once cargo operations are completed, the crew should perform a full search of the vessel. In addition to looking for illegal substances, the crew should be on the lookout for stowaways. If there are any suspicions that drugs may have been placed onboard, the Master should request a comprehensive vessel inspection, including inspection of the vessel's hull below the waterline, before departure. The most common measure is the anti-smuggling sub-aquatic survey (ROV) to deter, prevent and ascertain that no illegal substances are attached to the vessel below her waterline.

After departure

- Once the vessel has sailed and the outbound pilot has disembarked, a thorough search of all compartments should be conducted and the results recorded in the logbook.

Action to be taken if drugs are found onboard

If drugs are found on board the Master/SSO should immediately take steps as set out in the vessel's Emergency Contingency Plan (as per the ISM Code) and/or the Ship's Security Plan (as per the ISPS Code), one of which should include steps to be taken with regard to notification to the local authorities. The following general guidelines can also be given:

- The drugs must not be touched.
- Photograph or video the area of the ship where the drugs were found, but leave it untouched and seal it off to prevent any unauthorized access.
- Inform the P&I insurer, the local P&I correspondent, the Shipowner/Operator and the Flag Administration.

For more information please contact the Security Department at telephone + 1 703 251 2435 email security@liscr.com; LISCRC Duty Officer + 1 703 963 6216 email: dutyofficer@liscr.com;

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