

BRAZIL. WARNING OF DRUG SMUGGLING

Ingosstrakh's P&I Correspondent Brazil P&I reports on increase of cases of smuggling of illegal substances in Brazilian Ports.

The strategies used and type of vessel vary. In example, 155 kilograms of cocaine were found last year hidden within the sugar cargo in a bulk ship during loading operations at the port of Santos, which resulted in unloading operation of the substance following order from the Federal Police.

After nearly two years of investigation, a criminal group that used divers to strap drugs to the hull of cargo vessels, in the "sea chest", was arrested. On 5th Aug 2021, in Itaguaí port, 400 kilograms of drugs were found using a similar technique and clearly indicating that new attempts are still happening.

Most of the narcotics arrests are the result of containers being scanned, use of sniffer dogs and anonymous denunciations.

Upon entering the terminal, the container undergoes a routine analysis that assesses the risks of exported cargo. The verification includes variables such as the exporter, the transporter, and the destination. Europe is one of the destinations that most raises the alert, as it is one of the main markets for international drug trafficking.

The containers that circulate through the terminals - whether for export or import, with or without goods - are subjected to a survey by a scanner.

Although part of the arrests has been performed on board vessels, owners are not facing criminal investigations as the authorities have an understanding that the substances are smuggled by criminals, not connected to the vessel operations, with few cases in which the crew was reported to be involved.

In most of the cases that narcotics were found during operations, the police were called on board and the substances removed, and the vessels sailed without relevant delays.

At this point Correspondent highlights the importance of reporting any suspicious fact on board to the authorities, to agents and the P&I correspondents, collaborating with the authorities on the work against drug trafficking.

Although the authorities are making a strong effort to increase the combat against this matter, the volume of illegal substances not discovered is still high, with reports of narcotics being found at the destination ports, which depending on the local legislation, is bringing judicial matters to owners, ship, and cargo agents.

The Master and Ship Security Officer has the power to shift to a high level of the vessel security condition, irrespective of the established Port Security Level. This will enable the proper assessment of security risks and ensure that appropriate mitigation measures are implemented under the perceived ones.

On the other hand, Owners and Operators that usually trade to Brazil can improve their security plans keeping and assuring that ISPS CODE procedures are up to date as well as the Ship Security Plan of the vessel.

Other measures can be taken to enhance the security on board. Some are basic as proper illumination on the deck, vigilance always on gangway, keeping accurate records of activities of shore-based personnel and crew on board, keeping a constant lookout at holds.

Services can also be provided by third parties, such as sealing of the cargo holds by an independent surveyor and underwater inspections, in case of any suspicion of drug trafficking. Security guards can be arranged to increase the watch during loading operations.

CHINA. NEW REQUIREMENTS TO CONDUCT COVID-19 TESTING FOR CREW ONBOARD

Ingosstrakh's P&I Correspondent in China Messrs. Huatai Insurance Agency & Consultant Service Ltd., has advised that an announcement was published by the Ministry of Transport, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the General Customs on 2022.1.28 to be part of the control measures to prevent COVID-19 outbreak onboard. And this announcement came into force on 2022.2.15.

The text of the announcement is as follows:

The Announcement of the Ministry of Transport, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the General Customs of on Effectively Implementing Remote Prevention and Control Measures of the COVID-19 Outbreak Among the Crew Engaged on International Vessels.

For the purpose of further preventing the spread of COVID-19 from imported cases, protecting crewmembers on international vessels, the following matters in terms of strengthening the remote prevention measures of the COVID-19 among crewmembers engaged on international vessels, are hereby announced in accordance with the Frontier Health and Quarantine Law of the People's Republic of China, Emergency Response Law of the People's Republic of China and the Maritime

Traffic Safety Law of the People's Republic of China and Notice of Further Prevention and Control of the COVID-19 Outbreak Among the Crew Engaged on International Vessels issued by the Comprehensive Group of the Joint Prevention and Control Mechanism of the State Council in Response to COVID-19.

*1. This announcement applies to vessels scheduled to call China and change crews in Chinese ports.
2. All crews onboard shall take nucleic test within 48 hours after the vessel departs from its last overseas port. And the crew of whom the result is positive shall receive medical care timely at the nearest location. In order to curb the spread of COVID-19 and protect crews' health, during the voyage from the last overseas port to China, the latest version of Prevention and Control Plan of COVID-19 issued by the National Health Commission shall be followed, and a scheme shall be maintained ensuring that every crew shall take nucleic test regularly and the crew of whom the test result is positive shall be quarantined and treated.*

Nucleic test shall be the first choice for testing COVID-19. However, when these tests are unavailable, other quick measures such as antigen tests can serve as alternative. And the quick test products shall be approved by the drug regulatory agencies in China or other countries.

3. The regulations in terms of the requirements on the China-bound travelers in the latest version of Prevention and Control Plan of COVID-19 issued by the National Health Commission shall be followed. And crews shall take COVID-19 test on the first, fourth, seventh and fourteenth day of the voyage (if any), and on the day before calling. The result of these tests shall be recorded and kept. After completing all tests accordingly, the test results along with health monitor information shall be submitted to local MSA, the General Customs and other authorization of the first port of call one day in advance before calling. Guideline for Information to submit regarding Remote Prevention and Control Measures of the COVID-19 Outbreak among the Crew of Vessels Engaged on International Vessels is as attached for reference.

During the voyage after departing from the last port, if there are any abnormalities on health information or COVID-19 test results, the Master shall report to the shipping company or crew service organizations and take emergency response. Meanwhile, a scheme of self-quarantine and medical treatment shall be implemented. The MSA and the vessel shall report relevant information to the local Comprehensive Group of the Joint Prevention and Control Mechanism (Leading team, Headquarter).

4. This announcement aims to implement the remote prevention and control measures of COVID-19 and cannot be deemed as a prerequisite for crew change. And it will not exempt the nucleic test by the Customs entering China.

5. The embassies and consulates of China overseas shall facilitate the COVID-19 test and help crews in receiving medical treatment whose tests result are positive. And the Customs shall facilitate the test-and-approve procedure, health quarantine and transfer onboard procedure for antigen test kits.

6. All shipping companies and crew service organizations shall abide by this announcement and make necessary preparation. This announcement applies to shipping companies, crew service organizations.

In case of any violation to this announcement or relevant laws, punishments may be incurred by those who violated.

7. This announcement comes into effective on February 15th, 2022. China-bound vessels who depart the last overseas port after February 15th, 2022 shall abide by this regulation.

As it stands, MSA in Beijing has further advised that the "Notice" also applies to foreign seafarers scheduled to be changed in a Chinese port. On the other side, they admitted that due to strict COVID-19 prevention measures implemented by local Authorities, change of foreign seafarers at a Chinese port is still difficult in practice. Last but not least, it was also noted that this notice aims to be part of the control measures to prevent the COVID-19 outbreak onboard but will not act as a prerequisite for crew change. If requirements are met, seafarers can be changed in China despite the "notice" is not followed. However, in case of any violation to this announcement or relevant laws, punishments may be imposed against the relative party.

Despite the above, to be on the safe side, Shipowners are kindly recommended to contact P&I Correspondent or the shipping agent before calling a specific port to be updated of the latest local requirements.