

Illegal smuggling of drugs in Mexico

Overview

It is well established that Mexico serves as a transit country for narcotics smuggling. However, narcotics are less so shipped by sea from Mexico to other destinations. Instead, Mexico functions primarily as a transshipment hub for narcotics destined for the United States, with the actual crossing into U.S. territory typically occurring via other means of transport. Therefore, vessels entering Mexican ports should focus on mitigating the risk of narcotics being placed on board before the voyage commences.

Trends 2023-25

The beginning of 2023 saw a sudden increase in narcotics related incidents in Mexican West Coast Ports and an alert was accordingly circulated. The incidents were identified to be affecting bulk and tanker vessels alike. Affected vessels were calling at varied ports before Mexico (not a usual Latin American trade), as well as their future intended calls, including European countries and the USA.

Narcotics related incidents continued with the same intensity into 2024 and in July another alert was sent out alerting operators as to another increase in incidents. However, trends had changed and affected trades were back to Latin American trades, which is the usual trade affected by narcotics incidents in Mexico.

As of October 2024, there had been a recent increase in narcotics smuggling incidents involving vessels calling at Mexican ports and particularly with respect to container vessels arriving from Latin American ports, especially from Colombia.

Methods

The most common modus operandi over the last few years appears to be insertions in the sea chests, perhaps whilst the vessels are at anchorage, but the source of the narcotics insertion is currently unknown.

Guidance

- Increased watches while at Mexican anchorage are highly recommended and should be documented in detail in the vessel's logs.

- All other additional security measures should be carefully documented, and heightened if possible.
- Given the frequent concealment of narcotics within the vessel's sea chest, flushing of the sea chest, inspection of the strainers and a thorough documentation of these procedures is recommended
- If narcotics are found by the crew or another, adequate legal representation is of the utmost importance as well as immediate reporting of the same to the Harbour Master, in-line with local law.
- When arriving from Latin American ports, particularly Colombia, we advise conducting Underwater Inspections, K9 sweeps, and collecting CCTV footage
- All measures should be meticulously documented to ensure a robust defence strategy if contraband is found

! To note:

Mexican authorities treat any discovery of narcotics with the utmost severity. If narcotics are found by the crew or any other party, it is crucial to immediately secure legal representation and report the discovery without delay. In past incidents, crew members have been detained for up to two years before being released. However, recent cases show a shift in how authorities handle these matters. Where crews have taken the necessary steps to document and report their findings, authorities have conducted on-board investigations and seized the contraband with reasonable delays. This reflects a notable change in the authorities' approach and understanding of such incidents.

<https://grupodelmex.com>
pandiser@grupodelmex.com