

Drug smuggling in Brazil:

Overview

The Brazilian Federal Police has seized several tons of drugs at Paranagua in the last 3 to 4 years (mostly cocaine), generally destined to European countries (mainly Italy, Germany, Spain, and Belgium) and West African ports, and they have made numerous recent arrests locally in connection with drug smuggling by sea. We also note international news reporting of drugs seized abroad, in which Brazilian ports have been indicated as the origin.

Methods

The great majority of seizures are verified on drugs hidden in containers (mostly in the refrigeration compartment of reefer containers or dry containers carrying wood products), but as a consequence of a new task force employing Federal Police divers, recent seizures of drugs hidden on the underwater portion of the vessels' hulls (primarily in the sea chests) have increased, as well as numerous arrests and seizure of funds/properties/guns/vehicles ashore in order to try to dismantle the local "cartels".

By July 2023, the Federal Police and Customs-House reported that they had apprehended 1.443 kg of cocaine on the underwater hull portion of vessels, more than double of apprehensions in 2022:



NOTE: The latest major drug apprehensions by the Federal Police occurred on 14 January 2024 (75.5 kg of cocaine hidden on the sea chest of a vessel sailing from Paranagua to West Africa) and on 10 June 2024 (86 kg hidden on the refrigeration compartments of two reefer containers destined for South Africa and The Netherlands).

Guidance

In this respect, the local Federal Police, apart from carrying out underwater searches in vessels at random, usually find drugs on ships by anonymous denounces and/or through vessel's Masters that perceive suspicious boats/divers on the vicinities of the vessels (either at outer or inner anchorage) and inform the Federal Police with the aim of being submitted to underwater searches prior to sailing to their destination ports.

Thus, it is imperative that the crew keep an attentive watch whilst the vessel is at anchorage and alongside in line with ISPS regulations and, in case any abnormality is noted, the Master must immediately inform the local agents and authorities to take the necessary measures. It is also possible for shipowners to hire independent companies to carry out anti-narcotics services by means of hiring watchmen / camera monitoring / boat monitoring / sniffing dogs / underwater inspections at anchorage prior to sailing from the port.