

Loss Prevention Guidance on Anti-Narcotic Smuggling Measures - France

Drug smuggling on ships is a serious issue requiring a multi-layered approach to prevention. Recently, mainland France's largest cocaine seizure occurred on a vessel in the port of Dunkirk. According to our information, the drugs were discovered in a container, with an estimated value exceeding one hundred million euros.

Conversely, over the years, Marseille has become the primary entry point for chemical precursors in France. In 2024, out of the tens of tons seized, nine tons were intercepted in the port of Marseille.

French port authorities are extremely vigilant regarding this matter and conduct regular inspections of ships berthing within their jurisdiction. To this end, ship operators must be informed of the importance of the measures implemented by French customs. These measures notably include regular, and even systematic, detailed inspections of ships arriving from or calling at ports considered high-risk for drug smuggling. The ship's entire internal space, hull, cargo, and containers will be inspected using technological tools such as X-ray scanners and drug-detecting dogs.

Based on our experience, ship owners, operators, and crew are usually unaware of the presence of drugs onboard. Implementing these recommendations could potentially allow ship operators to avoid situations that could lead to significant financial losses.

Here are some key recommendations for ship owners, operators, and crew:

1. Security Measures:

- Access Control:
 - Strictly control access to the vessel, especially during port calls.
 - Implement robust security measures at gangways and other access points, which could also involve hiring watchmen.
 - Use CCTV surveillance systems to monitor key areas.
 - Limit the number of people allowed onboard.
- Cargo and Hold Security:
 - Conduct thorough inspections of cargo holds and containers before loading.
 - Seal containers and holds with tamper-evident seals.
 - Maintain accurate cargo documentation.
 - Regularly inspect and monitor cargo during transit.
- Underwater Security:
 - Be aware of the risk of drugs being attached to the hull by divers.
 - Conduct regular underwater inspections, especially in ports considered of high-risk to inspect the hull.
- Lighting:
 - Ensure that the vessel is well lit at night, particularly when in port.
- Search and inspections:
 - Conduct random searches of crew areas, and all areas of the vessel.
 - Use of drug detection dogs to search for narcotics.

2. Crew Training and Awareness:

- Drug Smuggling Awareness Training:
 - Educate crew members about the risks and methods of drug smuggling.
 - Train crew members to identify suspicious activity and potential hiding places.
 - Emphasize the importance of reporting any concerns.
- Background Checks:
 - Conduct thorough background checks on all crew members.
 - Be vigilant for signs of involvement in criminal activity.
- Reporting Procedures:
 - Establish clear procedures for reporting suspicious activity.
 - Encourage crew members to report any concerns without fear of reprisal.
 - When illicit substances are found on board, crew members must remain calm and follow the company's instructions (in accordance with the ISM Code and the company's Safety Management System, SMS). Suspected items must not be handled, and the area must be secured. Immediate steps must be taken to inform local authorities through agents, P&I Clubs, local correspondents, and the flag state. The master must ensure that a complete record of all communications is maintained.

3. Port and Terminal Security:

- Collaboration with Port Authorities:
 - Work closely with port authorities to enhance security measures.
 - Share information about potential threats.
- Security at Terminals:
 - Ensure that terminals have adequate security measures in place.
 - Monitor cargo loading and unloading operations.
 - Control access to terminal areas.

4. Documentation and Procedures:

- Accurate Documentation:
 - Maintain accurate and complete cargo documentation.
 - This can help identify discrepancies and potential smuggling attempts.
- Compliance with Regulations:
 - Adhere to all relevant international and national regulations regarding drug smuggling.
- Company Policies:
 - risk assessments.
 - Implement strict company policies regarding drug smuggling, with clear consequences for violations.

Key Considerations:

- **High-Risk Ports:** Pay extra attention to security in high-risk ports known for drug trafficking.
- **Crew Welfare:** Ensure that crew members are treated fairly and have access to support, as this can reduce the risk of them becoming involved in smuggling.
- **Constant Vigilance:** Drug smuggling is a constantly evolving threat, so continuous vigilance and adaptation are essential.

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