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To: All Masters, Ship Security Officers, Company Security Officers of Hong Kong registered ships, Hong Kong Shipowners, Hong Kong Ship Managers and Hong Kong Operators

Ship Operators Security and Quality Advisory No. 61

Drug Smuggling Cases Reported by Hong Kong Registered Ships

In the past few months, there had been five (5) drug smuggling cases happened on board Hong Kong registered ships with three (3) cases reported in South America ports and two (2) in European ports. There was one case that packs of suspicious drug over 200 kg in weight were found inside the low sea chest.

This circular serves as a reminder for companies and masters to take appropriate preventive security measures to reduce the possibility of drugs being placed aboard such as controlling the access to the ship when in port, as well as to increase watch during arrival at/departure from ports which are vulnerable to drug smuggling. The most common ways of illicit drug loading onto the ships are by concealing drug package(s) by traffickers boarding the ship, by means of cargo or containers, by conspiracy to conceal drugs involving ship's crew or shore staff, or by diver to secure drug packages to the underwater hull. Preventive measures shall be effectively implemented such that drug being illegally placed on board by the above loading means could be avoided or reduced as far as possible.

In addition, the following recommended measures should be considered when ship is proceeding/ leaving ports vulnerable to drug smuggling should be considered.

- To keep ship's access points from shore to a minimum and man them as far as practicable.
- To install CCTV cameras at access points to monitor and record boarding personnel.
- To keep a list of all shore visitors and port workers such as stevedores and cleaning / repairing gangs, and to scrutinize packages carried by them. Suspicious packages and behaviors of them should be alerted and reported to ship master immediately.
- To pay special attention to incoming vessel's stores and provisions, as well as cargos for possible inclusion of illicit drugs.
- To set up barricades to restrict movement of outsiders.
- To locked up compartments which are seldom used or vulnerable for hiding illicit drugs. Watch keepers should make random inspections to look for signs of tampering of locking arrangement.
- To fit steel guards in way of underwater spaces in hull or appendages, such as sea chest and rudder compartment.
- To place additional lighting over the side to illuminate the surrounding water and the port at night, particularly around the stern.
- To conduct shipboard searches and underwater inspection in accordance with the Ship Security Plan (SSP) before departure.
- To alert crew member that drug smugglers may attempt to befriend them in the hope of persuading them to hide drugs for financial gain. They should be reminded that committing drug trafficking is a serious crime that may face harsh penalties if convicted.

Drug illicitly loaded onboard could lead to delay of ship and port operations and could cause substantial economic losses to ship owners. Companies and masters are reminded to enhance the overall ship security by continuous educating and training of crew members, liaising between the competent authorities at the port and companies, remaining vigilant on possible illegal drug trafficking, and constantly reviewing the SSP.

In the event of discovering drugs onboard when the ship is in port, companies and masters should seek direction from port authorities on the course of action to be taken. If drugs are found during the ship is at sea, the authorities at the next port of call shall be notified before entering their territorial waters.

Detailed guidelines on the same topic can be found in the IMO Resolution MSC.228(82) Annex 14 “Revised Guidelines for the Prevention and Suppression of the Smuggling of Drugs, Psychotropic Substances and Precursor Chemicals on Ships engaged in International Maritime Traffic”. It is available on the IMO website:

[https://www.imo.org/en/KnowledgeCentre/IndexofIMOResolutions/Maritime-Safety-Committee-\(MSC\)/Documents/MSC.228\(82\).pdf](https://www.imo.org/en/KnowledgeCentre/IndexofIMOResolutions/Maritime-Safety-Committee-(MSC)/Documents/MSC.228(82).pdf)

Companies and masters are responsible for reporting the incident to the Security and Quality Assurance section of the Marine Department. An investigation report, including root cause analysis and any corrective and preventive actions taken by the Ship/Company, shall be handed in promptly. In addition to the corrective and preventive actions implemented for prevention of reoccurrence of similar incidents, the security arrangement in SSP shall also be reviewed and improved accordingly upon any weaknesses found.

For smuggling incident reporting and investigation report submission, please contact ~~Security and Quality Assurance~~ ^{Cargo Ships Safety*} section of the Marine Department (~~Email: sqa@mardep.gov.hk~~). mms@mardep.gov.hk*

Yours faithfully,

No signature on website copy

(Eric W.C. LEE)
Senior Surveyor of Ships/
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* With effect from 1 April 2021, mms@mardep.gov.hk will be the only e-mail address for Marine Department to handle ISM and ISPS issues on Hong Kong registered ships. The previous e-mail addresses, ssism@mardep.gov.hk and sqa@mardep.gov.hk, will be discontinued.