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MARINE DEPARTMENT

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20 March 2023

**To: All Masters, Ship Security Officers, Company Security Officers,
Shipowners, Ship Managers, Ship Operators and Recognized Security
Organizations of Hong Kong Registered Ships**

Dear Sir/Madam,

Ship Operators Security and Quality Advisory No. 73

Drug Smuggling Cases Reported by Hong Kong Registered Ships

Recently, there were number of cases of narcotics drugs hidden in the sea chest on Hong Kong-registered ships in Brazil and Gibraltar.

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.

Depending on the particular of each case, it may constitute a security incident (ISPS Code Part B paragraph 8.9). In case it is identified as a security incident, the CSO & SSO should consider reviewing the SSP and Ship Security Assessment (SSA) and record the update/amendment if necessary (ISPS Code Part A section 10.1); should follow the procedures in the SSP for reporting security incidents (ISPS Code Part A section 9.4.12); and should keep on board the records specified in ISPS Code section 10.1 for not less than three years (ISPS Part A section 10.1 & Cap. 582A rule 22(2)(d)). All security incidents should be reported to the nearest rescue coordination centre (RCC) or port Authorities, and to HKMD as follows:

Hong Kong Maritime Rescue Co-ordination Centre

(24 Hours Communication Focal Point)

Email : hkmrcc@mardep.gov.hk

Telephone : (852) 2233 7999

Fax : (852) 2541 7714

Detailed guidelines on the same topic can be found in the IMO Resolution MSC.228(82) "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://wwwcdn.imo.org/localresources/en/KnowledgeCentre/IndexofIMOResolutions/MSCResolutions/MSC.228\(82\).pdf](https://wwwcdn.imo.org/localresources/en/KnowledgeCentre/IndexofIMOResolutions/MSCResolutions/MSC.228(82).pdf).

Companies and masters are also responsible for reporting the incident to the Cargo Ships Safety (CSS) Section of the Marine Department. An investigation report, including root cause analysis, a copy of the crew list 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.

The Ship Operators Security and Quality Advisory No. 61 issued on 30 June 2020 is hereby superseded. For smuggling incident reporting and investigation report submission, please contact Cargo Ships Safety Section of the Marine Department (Email: mms@mardep.gov.hk)

Yours faithfully,

(No signature on website)

(R. LIU)
Senior Surveyor of Ships/
Cargo Ships Safety Section
for Director of Marine