

► BULLETIN

Surge in Piracy attacks

Situation

There has been a surge in piracy attacks in South East Asia, particularly in the Straits of Malacca, that we would like to draw to our Member's attention.

The International Maritime Bureau has reported 23 attacks between January and March 2014 and a further six attacks since April 2014 targeting coastal tankers, four involving our Member's vessels. Recent attacks have included theft of entire cargoes of diesel and gas oil, marking a shift for the region from petty theft and, in extreme cases, kidnapping, to an interest in oil products.

Alongside coastal tankers, slow moving tugs and barges have been targeted, with a number of our Member's vessels suffering attacks in recent months.

Investigations report that piracy attacks primarily take place during hours of darkness and entail pirates armed with light weapons gaining access to the vessel via the main deck. In some cases, the crew are overpowered and detained in locked rooms. In addition, communication and alarm systems have been destroyed or disarmed and in some cases pirates have demonstrated proficiency in operating the vessel.

Once the pirates have taken full operational control of the vessel, the cargo has been siphoned off to tankers or tank barges brought alongside. Occasionally the ship's crew have been forced to assist the preparation and transfer of cargo. Such incidents have taken place not only when the vessels are underway but also at anchorages. On completion of the ship-to-ship transfer, the pirates disembark the vessel, leaving the crew detained.

We strongly reiterate the calls of the International Maritime Bureau to our Members' that have vessels trading in the region: immediately adopt the necessary and appropriate anti-piracy measures in an effort to minimise exposure to the risk of piracy. Pirates do not attempt to board ships that appear to be vigilant.

Recommendation

We recommend that our Members draw up and ensure satisfactory implementation of suitable anti-piracy measures. These measures could include, but are not limited to:

- Conducting voyage-specific risk assessments in respect to the precautionary measures in place and thereby evaluate the risk.
- Planning passages with appropriate caution given to high risk areas and avoiding transiting those areas during hours of darkness. The passage plans should be evaluated by the Master en-route and any detour/changes to the plan may be made as considered necessary by the Master to minimise the risk of the vessel being attacked.
- Increasing position reporting from the vessel to the Member when transiting high risk areas.
- Increasing watch keeping, lookouts and bridge manning.
- Installing fire hoses (with fire pumps either running or on stand-by mode) on the ship sides, stern and any other vulnerable points.
- Installing sufficient search lights on bridge wings and making regular use of those whilst transiting high risk areas.
- Training Master and duty officers in suitable evasive manoeuvres.
- Training ship staff in anti-piracy drills.
- Installing razor/barbed wire or physical barriers around the stern and lowest points of access.
- Installing electronic vessel tracking systems on board the vessel.