

MEMBER ALERT

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STOWAWAYS HIDING IN RUDDER STOCK RECESS

We have seen, in a growing number of ports on the East coast of South America, problems with stowaways hiding in the rudder stock recess (or rudder trunk) of ships. The objective of this alert is to bring this problem to the attention of our Members so that proper precautions can be taken in order to prevent stowaways from boarding the vessel in this manner.

The Club would like to thank Pandi Liquidadores S.R.L., in Buenos Aires and Technical Maritime Associates, Inc., in Louisiana for their assistance with this Member Alert.

Stowaways hiding in the rudder stock

According to the information given by various stowaways, they wait in the port area until after dark and then swim to the rudder stock, climbing it and hiding inside the recess. Having gained access to an outer area of the vessel, they cannot then be easily found by the ship's crew.

Far too often, one or two stowaways die during the journey, either because they fall into the water or because they get sick while travelling. In many cases, they arrive to port in poor physical condition (primarily dehydrated), but generally recover well.

Most of these vessels come from Africa in ballast and, for that reason, the rudder stock recess stays above the water. Nevertheless, while the vessel is in transit, it rolls and pitches and exposes the stowaways to the sea.

Recommendations

The ship's crew should make all efforts to check that stowaways are not hiding in the rudder stock recess, particularly when loading or discharging cargo at ports or terminals in Africa. In general, it is the crew's first priority to check for stowaways onboard ship. However, attention should also be paid to ensure that no stowaways have accessed the rudder stock recess.

Typically, the crew can only access the rudder trunk via a manhole cover fitted in the aft peak tank. Since this tank is normally in ballast and/or filled with freshwater, examination of the rudder stock recess during a pre-departure stowaway search is not always practical. If access to the rudder stock recess cannot be gained via the aft peak tank, it is recommended that the crew utilize a small boat, such as the rescue boat or paint raft, in order to check for stowaways in the rudder stock recess.

We would like to remind Members that as of July 1, 2004 the International Ship and Port Security (ISPS) Code shall come into effect. We advise Members to seriously consider appropriate measures to be included in the Ship Security Plan (SSP) to prevent stowaways gaining access to the vessel and/or going undetected.