

Stop Loss UPDATE

November 2021

Re-purposing of Bulk Carriers in the Container Trade



Recent events globally have put considerable pressure on the intermodal transport network for ISO containers. Slots on container ships have at times become scarce and increasingly expensive. As a result, bulk carrier-operating Members have been approached to carry containerised goods in their bulk carrier cargo holds or above deck.

It should be kept in mind that bulk carriers are in the most part not designed for the carriage of containers. This is particularly the case for hopper hold bulk carriers where there is no prospect of any lashing and securing points being in place. The situation is made even more difficult by the presence of the bottom hopper tanks, which means that containers cannot be stowed up to the edge of the hold.

Carriage of containers above deck, including carriage on top of hatch covers, can also be problematic in that the customary deck sockets will not be present. Indeed, the hatch covers may not be suitable to carry such a load while maintaining the design compression and weathertight integrity of the hatch cover system in a seaway. This could make the defence of any resulting water ingress claims difficult.

It is highly unlikely that the Ship's Cargo Securing Manual will have any instructions on the carriage of ISO containers. In these circumstances, suitable lashing eyes and dunnage should be fitted to meet the requirements of CSS Code (Code of Safe Practice for Cargo Stowage and Securing), along with an assessment of tank top loading and hatch cover loading, depending on the planned stowage.

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It is vital that the stowage plan meets the requirements of the CSS Code, and a detailed lashing and securing plan is drawn up to ensure that the method and lashing equipment used is compliant.

It is recommended that expert advice is sought at the planning stage and that suitable assessment of the physical modifications inside the hold/on deck are verified as being capable of withstanding the securing loads that are prescribed for the containers to be loaded.

To remain seaworthy at the commencement of the voyage under the provisions of The Hague Visby Rules, the carrier must demonstrate verification of compliance with the CSS Code and show that the weathertight integrity of the hatch cover system was not compromised by the stowage as planned.

In all cases whether by design or by modification, the ship must be Classed for the Carriage of Containers and therefore the earliest involvement of the Ship's Classification Society is recommended.

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Managers
A. Bilbrough & Co. Ltd.

London
50 Leman Street
London E1 8HQ
T: +44 20 7772 8000
F: +44 20 7772 8200
E: london@londonpandi.com

Greece
Ionion Building
Akti Miaouli & 2,
Il Merarchias Street
185 35 Piraeus
T: +30 210 458 6600
F: +30 210 458 6601
E: piraeus@londonpandi.com

Hong Kong
Unit 3603
36/F Citicorp Centre
18 Whitfield Road
Causeway Bay
Hong Kong
T: +852 3761 5678
F: +852 2838 2001
E: hongkong@londonpandi.com

Cyprus
Esperidon 5
4th Floor
Strovolos, 2001
Nicosia
T: +357 25 26 08 00
F: +357 25 26 08 02
E: cyprus@londonpandi.com

Republic of Korea
In association with:
AB Korea
17th Floor
Gong-Deok Building
11 Saechang-ro
Mapo-gu
Seoul
T: +82 2 704 7440
E: london@ab-korea.com

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