

Circular From UK

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Kidnappings of seafarers - West Africa

The Club was recently involved in another case of kidnapping crew members in West Africa.

According to a recent International Maritime Bureau's (IMB) report, more crew were kidnapped at sea in 2016 than in any of the previous ten years.

The conditions in which seafarers are held are generally poor, the major threat being the highly unhygienic conditions. The camps in which hostages are held vary, but most are in very swampy areas far from any settlements. Mosquitoes and other insects are a constant presence, and snakes are commonly seen. Bites from insects can lead to infections and illness during and post captivity. Food is also often in short supply. Poor hygiene can lead quickly to ill health, with many kidnap victims suffering episodes of diarrhoea and vomiting while in captivity.

It is very important that crews understand the risk of kidnap, are properly trained for survival in a hostile environment and have confidence in their management that they are well prepared to deal with the situation, and will provide them and their families with the support that they need in the time of crisis.

The following are practical tips to Members on how to avoid incidents with West African pirates:

1. The ship should be operating at a heightened state of security throughout, including additional watch-keeping, roving patrols and fire hoses rigged at the railings; outside doors of the accommodation should be closed and locked from the inside, and temporary barriers erected around the outside stairwells - risk of attack is particularly high when the ship is at anchor or is drifting off a port e.g., close to pilot station or when carrying out Ship-to-Ship (STS) transfer operations.
2. For the purposes of identifying suitable measures of prevention, mitigation and recovery in case of piracy, it is imperative that a ship and voyage-specific risk assessment is performed well in advance, as recommended in Section 3 of the Best Management Practices Version 4 (BMP4).
3. Limit the use of lighting at night and reduce the power or turn off the Automatic Identification System (AIS). However, local laws regulating the operation of AIS should be considered and AIS should be reactivated immediately in the event of the ship being attacked.
4. Review and Comply with Guidelines for Owners, Operators and Masters for Protection against Piracy in the Gulf of Guinea Region, to be read in conjunction with BMP4.
5. Careful planning is important and procedures outlined in Section 6 of BMP4 should be followed. Where a vessel is on a regular rotation or at anchorage / conducting STS operations over a prolonged

period, particular care should be taken to limit external communications with third parties.

6. Maintain regular reporting to Marine Domain Awareness for Trade - Gulf of Guinea service (MDAT-GoG) while operating within the Voluntary Reporting Area (VRA), which is shown on Admiralty chart Q6114.
7. In the event of any Members considering the use of armed guards, seek the Club's advice, as this is closely regulated by the West African authorities. A number of vessels this year have been detained in Nigeria, simply for having security consultants on board (whether armed or unarmed).

Kidnappings are not incidents particular only to West Africa. The escalation of crew kidnappings in some "emerging areas", such as Sulu Sea between East Malaysia and the Philippines is a particular concern. The latest IMB report shows that last year 28 crew members were kidnapped from tugs, barges, fishing boats, and more recently merchant ships around Malaysia and Indonesia.

Source of Information: UK P&I Club