

**Circular From NORTH****Date: 20 May 2022**

## **The New Normal or A Bad Idea? Beware Requests for Unconventional Carriage**

**With container freight rates rocketing and containership capacity squeezed, more bulk carrier operators are considering carrying cargoes that are usually containerised.**

Carriers are exploring the possibilities of carrying break-bulk cargoes that traditionally would have been shipped in a container, in the cargo holds of bulk carriers; typically, in bags, FIBCs (Flexible Intermediate Bulk Containers – also known as jumbo bags) or IBCs (Intermediate bulk containers).

### **Shifting trades**

Bulk operators presented with the opportunity to carry cargoes in break-bulk that would usually be containerised should be aware of the risks associated with the proposed cargo. Not all containerised cargoes are suited to this method of shipment.

Some of the cargoes considered for break-bulk:

### **Bagged Coffee**

Coffee a high-value commodity, with current prices at around US\$6 per kilo for Arabica beans and around half that for Robusta. The carriage of coffee beans using any recognised method presents the carrier with challenges. The beans are hygroscopic and will contain a significant amount of moisture. This makes them vulnerable to condensation which then wets the bags.

The chances of condensation taking place are increased by the transport of the coffee beans from the warm moist growing regions to cooler climates, which is typical of the trading routes.

The primary source of wetting is the formation of condensation on steel structures (“Ship’s sweat”). This then comes into contact with the bags. When carrying bagged coffee using the current industry practice of dry standard containers, the same risk is present. There is very limited ventilation, so moist air is not effectively expelled. Therefore, cardboard or Kraft paper lining is applied to protect the cargo. The

effectiveness of this method is disputed, however.

Cargo experts BMT advise against carrying bagged coffee in cargo holds because of this high risk of wetting damage, which leads to fungal growth. It is very challenging to ensure sufficient dunnaging is applied to prevent cargo-to-steel contact and hold ventilation may be limited in its effectiveness. As we reported [here](#), the effectiveness of building ventilation channels into the stow is unproven.

A further risk in carrying bagged coffee in break-bulk is crushing damage, caused by the weight of the cargo loaded above.

## **Chemicals**

Some chemicals have traditionally been carried in containers, such as sodium metabisulphite, are now being carried in jumbo bags as break-bulk cargo.

If overloaded or poorly stowed, jumbo bags can split, and their contents can leak into the hold.

Not only does this present a health hazard to those working in the hold, but the spill can also cause damage to adjacent cargo and the steel structure of the cargo hold.

## **Car parts**

Parts used in the manufacture of vehicles are increasingly finding their way on board bulk carriers as break-bulk cargo; usually packed within crates and/or palletised. The shippers must ensure the protection afforded by the crate or packaging is suitable, but it is also important that these are properly stowed and secured in the hold.

## **Seek advice**

Whilst the shipping industry is used to adapting to new requirements from its customers and to solving capacity issues to keep trade flowing, requests to carry cargoes in an unconventional manner need to be carefully scrutinised, particularly when dealing with dangerous or high value cargoes.

There are particular concerns given reported shortages in reefer capacity in relation to high value cargoes requiring temperature control, such as some pharmaceuticals.

Carriage of cargoes in IBC tanks laid across the top of a bulk stow of grain, for example, may prevent effective fumigation, ventilation and may lead to contamination issues.

Cover may be prejudiced where unconventional cargo arrangements mean a cargo is incapable of being carried in accordance with a safe and proper system, or if the carriage is imprudent for some other reason. The carriage of rare and valuable cargo may require approval in advance from the managers of the means used for the carriage of the cargo. Further, any change or alternation in the risk due to the carriage of an unconventional cargo requires prompt disclosure to the Club to ensure that cover remains in place.

Legal advice should be sought when a carrier is requested by a charterer to carry cargo in an unconventional manner. Depending on the terms of the charterparty, such an order may be illegitimate, particularly if compliance would be impossible or unsafe. Owners may wish to explore taking a Letter of Indemnity from a charterer who requests unconventional carriage arrangements.

**Find out more**

[Read our Loss Prevention Briefing on the Carriage of Break-Bulk Cargoes](#)

Source of Information: The North of England P&I Club