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Toronto litigation company

## Alarm over exploding Reefers

Posted by [Gavin Magrath](#) on October 30, 2011

At least 900 refrigerated containers ('reefers') have been identified and quarantined at locations around the world after a series of mysterious explosions, according to the [World Cargo News](#).

While the precise causes of the explosions are still under investigation, Maersk said it had ascertained that all three refrigeration units involved had received gas repairs in Vietnam between late March and late April. It is suspected that a contaminated or incorrect refrigerant was introduced to the system that creates a flammable or explosive mixture after combining with air, oils, or other chemicals present.

Owing to this uncertainty, all makes of reefer and all carriers could presently be affected. Carrier Transcold, the world's biggest reefer container machinery manufacturer, sent an urgent safety bulletin to service centres: customers are advised to quarantine any units that were serviced in Vietnam in 2011 and not to attempt top service such units as serious injury or death could result from apparently spontaneous combustion.

31 October 2011

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## Exploding boxes spark alarm

**Exploding refrigerated containers have prompted worldwide enquiries.**



The investigation was set in motion by Maersk Line, which alerted the World Shipping Council's Safe Transport of Containers Working Group to a problem.

The container line has recently experienced unexplained explosions in three refrigeration units. Such incidents have so far resulted in three fatalities.

Maersk's own investigation uncovered the fact that all three boxes had undergone gas repairs in Vietnam between late March and late April.

It urged other companies which had similar repairs to investigate these units.

Major brands of reefer boxes, such as Thermo-King, Star Cool, Carrier and Daikin are all under suspicion.

It is suspected that unsuitable or contaminated refrigerant gas has been introduced into the machinery.

A chemical reaction with the R134a gas occurs and an inflammable or explosive mixture is generated.

One manufacturer has sent an urgent safety bulletin alerting service centres to the possibility of compressor ruptures.

Container lines have so far identified some 900 suspect refrigeration units that have now been quarantined.

The quarantine recommendation covers any refrigerated container that has been serviced in Vietnam during 2011.

Maersk has issued guidelines that any suspect boxes be cross-stuffed, the machinery unplugged and the containers be stored in an isolated position with the machinery facing away from people or traffic.

By [Andrew Lansdale](#) in London

31 October 2011

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## Explosive container danger halts Port of Oakland

Monday, October 31, 2011

By Tomas Roman

OAKLAND, Calif. (KGO) -- Dock workers at the Port of Oakland refused to unload ships that are loaded with what they call explosive contents. At least two terminals at the port were closed Monday night because of the threat. It is an extra challenge for the port already preparing a possible blockade by Occupy Oakland on Wednesday and the backup is extensive.

The longshoremen are refusing to move any containers at certain terminals because they say refrigerated containers that were improperly serviced in Vietnam have already exploded in Vietnam, China, and Brazil. Some of those containers have been found in Oakland and other West Coast ports.

Photos were taken in Vietnam of one of the five refrigerated containers that exploded at a port there last Friday. Three dock workers were killed and 16 were injured. An Oakland longshoreman got hold of the photos, but fears losing his job if he speaks on camera. He learned that some of the same types of containers had arrived here in Oakland Monday morning.

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[Story: 'Occupy Oakland' plans general strike](#)

The longshoreman said, "At 8 o'clock this morning we got the word that the containers that were over at SSA were actually some of the containers that were on the list that weren't supposed to get here."

There was a list of refrigerated containers that had been serviced in Vietnam with an unstable form of freon according to the longshoremen's union. They say that's why they exploded.

"They have apparently taken at least three lives and may have injured many more people," said ILWU spokesperson Craig Merrilees.

They were supposed to be taken out before coming to the U.S. The ILWU says they were not and thousands of them are either in ports or out on the water.

"There are potentially thousands of containers being shipped around the world, some that have ended up on docks here in Oakland, they're potentially lethal," said Merrilees.

There are also reports of refrigerated containers exploding in China and Brazil since Thursday. Hundreds of longshoremen on Monday refused to unload any ships or move any containers until those improperly serviced in Vietnam are removed.

"I think we know that at least two terminals, both the SSA and TraPac terminal have been shut down," said Merrilees.

The longshoreman who wanted to remain anonymous said, "Until we get it resolved we're not going to work."

If the longshoremen don't work, neither do the truckers. With the terminals closed dozens of trucks line the roads of the port unable to load or unload.

A trucker ABC7 spoke to also wanted anonymity. He said, "I was supposed to turn in my empty containers in and then take loads out and I couldn't do anything." When asked how long he had been there stuck in line, he said, "All day."

So far the U.S. Coast Guard has isolated at least 13 of these problem containers, but they're looking at the same issue in Tacoma, Washington, Portland, Oregon, and in Long Beach.

The Pacific Maritime Association, the longshoreman's union and the shippers are all trying to get together to work this issue out and get the cargo moving.

31 October 2011

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## Reefer Container Scare Leads to Seattle, Oakland Stoppages

Bill Mongelluzzo, Associate Editor, Stephanie Nall, Special Correspondent | Oct 31, 2011 10:00PM GMT  
*The Journal of Commerce Online - News Story*

Faulty refrigerated containers serviced in Vietnam, killed three people last spring

Longshoremen at the Port of Oakland began refusing to work vessels calling at the TraPac and SSA Marine terminals this week, joining actions that began at the Port of Seattle last week in response to concerns over exploding refrigerated containers, according to published reports.

The companies that service the containers in Vietnam have warned containers can explode when they are powered up, according to the San Jose [Mercury News](#). Maritime authorities report that three of the reefer containers exploded or caused fire, resulting in two fatalities in Vietnam and one in Brazil during the spring. The explosions are believed to be the result of contaminated gas added to the refrigerated units during servicing in Vietnam.

Three containers that exploded were operated by Maersk Line, but the danger has all container carriers scrambling to find any reefer boxers that have been repaired in Vietnam since February removed from power sources and quarantined.

Maersk Line has removed all 844 reefer containers in its fleet that have undergone repairs in Vietnam since February.

"While we cannot state with total certainty that we have identified the root cause, we are confident that we have taken the necessary precautions to avoid further incidents," said Soren Toft, head of center operations, inland terminals and equipment at Maersk.

The latest explosion came Oct. 7 in Itajai, Brazil, and killed a technician working on the unit, a Maersk spokesman said.

The International Longshore and Warehouse Union local in Oakland is refusing to work three vessels at the SSA Marine terminal, demanding that the terminal provide a history of all of the containers on the vessels. SSA Marine is willing to identify all of the containers that are from Vietnam, as is being done at facilities in Southern California.

Two ships at the TraPac terminal have been idled.

The Pacific Maritime Association, which represents waterfront employers, reached that agreement with the ILWU local in Los Angeles-Long Beach, but the ILWU local in Oakland reportedly wants the entire history of all reefer containers.

A similar job action occurred over the weekend in Seattle-Tacoma, but employers and the ILWU local also reached an agreement and longshormen are back to handling reefer containers in the Pacific Northwest.

Shipping lines have notified the World Shipping Council of links between malfunctioning reefer containers and the servicing of those containers at shipyards in Vietnam.

# Maersk Line withdraws over 800 reefer boxes after explosions

**Contaminated coolant suspected after three men are killed while carrying out maintenance and repairs**

ROGER HALEY AND SYLVIA TRAGANIDA

MAERSK Line has grounded 844 of its refrigerated containers with suspected contaminated coolant after three men died in explosions while carrying out maintenance and repairs on three reefer units.

It is understood that three other container lines — one of which is thought to be CMA CGM — are affected by the same potential problem with contaminated coolant pumped in at repair yards in Vietnam.

The total number of reefer boxes subject to a quarantine is not yet known. CMA CGM has been approached for comment.

A spokesman for Maersk Line said the gas contamination for its own brand boxes was linked to repairs carried out at the APM Shipping repair yard in Vietnam. Two men died at the yard in April and a third in Brazil on October 7.

He confirmed that its 844 reefer boxes were subject to quarantine notice as a "precautionary measure", and stressed: "We do not know whether they are affected".

The warning notice put out to industry affects those reefer units that underwent repairs in Saigon from February 1 this year.

Maersk said that, at the time it decided to quarantine the reefers, 173 were still on board up to 100 vessels, and that the majority of the units have now been switched off. The line is still awaiting "final confirmation" that 10 units on board have been turned off.

"The cooling units on the three Maersk Line reefer containers came from Carrier and Star Cool.

We also have reefers with Daikin and Thermo King," the spokesman said. "We can again not confirm whether they are potentially affected as that would be speculating."

Maersk Line informed the World Shipping Council on October 18 that it had "identified a link between three incidents involving malfunctioning refrigerated containers".

"Because other container lines have experienced similar incidents, Maersk Line also urged the council to ask its members to immediately share all information they have about any similar incident," Maersk said in a statement.

"Maersk Line has identified that the three containers that malfunctioned, resulting in three fatalities this year, had undergone gas system repairs and maintenance in APM Saigon Shipping repair yard between March 30, 2011 and April 25, 2011. All employees on shore and at sea,



Maersk has grounded 844 refrigerated containers after safety concerns were raised.

business partners, and relevant authorities were notified, and the process of locating, shutting down and removing these containers from operation was immediately begun. Vessel crews, depot and terminal operators have been given specific instructions on how to handle and store them safely.

Maersk said that it had "identified and removed" from operation all other reefer containers in its fleet that had had repairs or maintenance to the gas system while in any location in Vietnam during this period.

"As an additional precaution Maersk Line has removed or switched off all containers that had repairs or maintenance to the gas system in any location in Vietnam since February 1, 2011," Maersk said. "Early results from joint investigations together with refrigeration unit manufacturers

and external reefer specialists confirm our suspicions that the cause of the explosions was contaminated gas in the cooling units of these containers."

Maersk said there was no indication that improper repair procedures could have been the cause. Other container lines had had similar incidents with reefer containers repaired in Vietnam but at different repair yards and Maersk is working with the World Shipping Council to gather and share information to ensure the right measures were being taken.

It is understood that the Saigon explosions took place in a military-controlled area and that Maersk Line has still only received a preliminary report on the cause of the explosion.

It was able to undertake a fuller examination of the causes behind

the Brazilian explosion, hence the call to the WSC.

APM Terminals Bahrain has already suspended maintenance and repairs on reefer containers as a precaution following "incidents involving explosions" in Vietnam and Brazil.

The container terminal subsidiary of AP Moller-Maersk said: "As you are probably aware there have been increasing safety concerns about reefers globally following incidents involving explosions to reefers while they were in the process of being repaired."

"The matter is being investigated by terminals and lines involved and full such time that we have a clear conclusion on the reasons for these explosions, we shall be suspending all repairs to reefers with immediate effect."

[www.lloydslist.com/containers](http://www.lloydslist.com/containers)

1<sup>st</sup> November 2011

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## Container trouble spreads

Port of Oakland dock workers are giving 'unsafe' containers, which are said to have turned up at the port, a wide berth.



### *Container fears surface at Oakland*

Their action has closed two terminals as the workers refused to handle what they said may be hazardous containers, according to local media reports.

The boxes are believed to be of the same type as the Vietnamese-serviced refrigerated containers which exploded causing death and injury.

Maerk Line issued an alert following explosions involving reefer containers which the company traced back to being serviced in Vietnam.

Three boxes exploded causing the deaths of three workers.

Some of those containers have been found in Oakland and other West Coast ports, reports say.

By [Julian Macqueen](#) in London