

31 October 2011

Fears of potentially hazardous containers close two Port of Oakland terminals

By Cecily Burt
Oakland Tribune

OAKLAND -- It seems the Port of Oakland has more immediate problems than Wednesday's planned general strike.

The dockworkers' union forced the shutdown of two marine terminals Monday morning over concerns that refrigerated container units that were serviced in Vietnam during March and April could explode when they are powered up. The closures were expected to continue Tuesday.

The companies that supply the containers have issued safety bulletins. Memos to the Oakland marine terminals say that the union will not allow any refrigerated units through the gates until it gets a list of all refrigerated units serviced or regassed in Vietnam.

According to an Oct. 26 article in World Cargo News, refrigerated containers have been quarantined around the world after reports of "compressor explosions and incidents of spontaneous combustion that have resulted in at least three fatalities."

The problem could have something to do with the addition of incompatible or unsuitable refrigerant gas, the article said.

So far the shutdown at Oakland's port has affected the SSA and TraPac terminals, but the impacts were felt far and wide as long lines of trucks snaked down Maritime Street and Middle Harbor Road. SSA will also be closed on Tuesday, according to an automated announcement.

By midafternoon Monday, the Coast Guard had isolated about 13 containers that had been serviced in Vietnam and inspected three, said Isaac Kos-Read, director of external affairs for the port.

He said the port is working with the Coast Guard and the Pacific Maritime Association to resolve the container problem. "There have been no injuries at the Port of Oakland," Kos-Read said.

1st November 2011

Dangerous reefer units stop Oakland work

Tuesday, November 01, 2011

Members of the International Longshore and Warehouse Union are refusing to work ships in California's Port of Oakland because of concerns that refrigerant in the cooling systems of refrigerated containers may be contaminated and explode. ILWU spokesman Craig Merrilees said that workers at the SSA Marine Terminal in Oakland stopped work on Sunday morning because of concerns about the safety of these containers. Robert Bernardo, a spokesman for the Port of Oakland, said late M...

http://www.americanshipper.com/Main/News/Dangerous_reefer_units_stop_Oakland_work_47486.aspx

1 November 2011

Alarm sounded over exploding reefers

Hundreds of refrigerated containers have been quarantined in various locations around the world following reports of compressor explosions and incidents of spontaneous combustion that have resulted in at least three fatalities.

The alarm was raised by Maersk Line on 18 October when it informed the World Shipping Council's Safe Transport of Containers Working Group that it had recently experienced three cases in which refrigeration units had exploded for no apparent reason.

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 and advised other lines that had had similar gas repairs or maintenance to refrigeration units in Vietnam to identify and investigate those units.

2nd November 2011

Oakland dockers strike after three killed in reefer box explosions

FEARS of exploding reefer containers have prompted a dock strike at the Port of Oakland after Maersk Line confirmed that three have died in such explosions in Vietnam and Brazil.

Maersk Line said it has identified and removed from operation all 844 reefer containers in its fleet that have had repairs or maintenance to the gas system in Vietnam since February.

Maersk Line said investigations by manufacturers and reefer specialists show that the explosions were caused by contaminated gas in the cooling units in the containers. The containers underwent gas system repairs and maintenance at the same repair yard in Vietnam between March 30 and April 25.

Craig Merrilees, spokesman for the International Longshore and Warehouse Union, said the men are refusing to work ships in Oakland, reported American Shipper. World Cargo News magazine also reported there was a compression rupture in China.

Said Maersk Line shore equipment chief Soren Toft: "We know other container lines have also had incidents with reefer containers that have been at different repair yards in Vietnam. It is an industry issue which must be addressed with urgency and transparency."

The carrier noted the incident appears to have nothing to do with the design of the refrigeration units. Both Maersk Star Cool and Carrier Transcold units have had explosions.

A spokesman for refrigeration technology manufacturer Carrier said it has sent warnings to all of its customers and service centres.

Maersk said its investigation into a recent accident at a repair yard in Oakland revealed that the reefer's cooling unit did not explode, but ignited into a small fire. There were no explosions and no injuries. But the boxes had been in Vietnam, Maersk said.

2nd November 2011

California dockers fear exploding reefers

Kizzi Nkwocha | Wed, 2 Nov 2011

Port workers at Oakland refuse to handle boxes that may have been repaired in Vietnam

Longshoremen at the Californian port of Oakland are refusing to work on vessels calling at the TraPac and SSA Marine terminals after concerns that refrigerated containers could explode.

Maritime authorities report that three reefer containers have exploded or caused fire, resulting in two fatalities in Vietnam and one in Brazil.

The explosions were believed to be the result of contaminated gas added to the boxes' refrigeration units during servicing in Vietnam.

The three reefers that exploded were operated by Maersk Line, but since the danger was reported all carriers are scrambling to find any reefers that have been repaired in Vietnam since February.

Maersk has removed all its 844 reefer containers that have been repaired in Vietnam.

Soren Toft, head of centre operations, inland terminals and equipment, said: "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."

The latest explosion, on 7 October in Itajai, Brazil, killed a technician working on the reefer, a Maersk spokesman said.

International Longshore and Warehouse Union members in Oakland are refusing to work on three vessels at the SSA Marine terminal, demanding a history of all of the containers on board.

In a statement today, APL declared its 50,000-strong reefer fleet safe.

"We have reviewed our inspection records and procedures and are fully confident that our refrigerated containers are safe," said Eric Eng, VP of APL's Global Refrigerated Trade.

"But to allay concerns, we are adding new requirements, stepping up our inspection program and strengthening maintenance procedures."

2nd November 2011

Maersk pulls 844 reefer boxes after fatalities

by Lloyd's List — last modified Nov 02, 2011 12:19 PM

Hundreds of reefer boxes, which are suspected of carrying contaminated coolant, were shut-down and withdrawn from service after three men died in explosions while carrying out maintenance and repairs on three units.

A Maersk spokesman has confirmed the withdrawal of the boxes from service and described it as a “precautionary measure.”

It is understood that three other container lines are affected by the same problem - contaminated coolant was apparently pumped into the...

<http://www.lloydslistdcn.com.au/archive/2011/november/02/maersk-pulls-844-reefer-boxes-after-fatalities>