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West Coast Isolating Vietnam Reefer Containers

Bill Mongelluzzo, Associate Editor | Nov 2, 2011 12:13AM GMT
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Terminal operators, handlers cooperating to identify boxes after fatal explosions

Waterfront employers are working with the International Longshore and Warehouse Union to identify and isolate at-risk refrigerated containers arriving at West Coast ports from Vietnam.

In recent months, four reefer containers exploded or caught on fire, resulting in two deaths in Vietnam and one on Brazil.

"All indications point to maintenance work conducted on refrigerated units processed at the Port of Kat Lai in Vietnam," the Pacific Maritime Association, which represents terminal operators and shipping lines, said in a statement.

The ILWU in the past few days refused to work vessels at two terminals in Oakland and a terminal in Seattle. The ILWU demanded a complete history of the containers on the vessel, but employers offered information only on those containers that had been in Vietnam.

In a statement Tuesday, the ILWU said it is taking steps to segregate potentially faulty containers and prevent them from leaving the terminals. "It's impossible to know which containers might pose deadly combustion hazards just by looking at them," said Leal Sundet, representative of the ILWU's Coast Longshore Division.

He said the ILWU has offered to transload cargo from potentially dangerous containers before they leave the terminals.

The PMA said it is working with ILWU locals at West Coast ports on agreements that will protect workers while keeping ports operating. An agreement was reached in Los Angeles-Long Beach, and the PMA said it is working on similar agreements with ILWU locals in Oakland, Seattle and Tacoma to develop.

All refrigerated containers that have passed through any port in Vietnam are being identified on arrival at West Coast ports. Those reefer containers that have been worked on in Kat Lai are isolated for special handling, the PMA said.

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APL clears reefer boxes for use



APL has confirmed its reefer boxes are safe for use.

Maritime Impressions

NEPTUNE Orient Lines' container shipping arm APL confirmed that its refrigerated boxes were safe after grounding 103 containers as a precaution following the death of three men in explosions on Maersk Line and CMA CGM reefer boxes under repair, writes *Sylvia Traganida*.

APL said there had been no explosions or fatalities with its boxes and announced new safety measures to prevent future incidents. Apart from the grounding of the boxes, the company has placed new restrictions on where the containers can undergo refrigerant system repairs and it will ensure that the refrigerant used in all its reefer containers meets the specifications of equipment manufacturers. Also, it will restrict refrigeration system repair work to a smaller number of certified providers.

"We have reviewed our inspection records and procedures, and are fully confident that our refrigerated containers are safe and in cargo-worthy condition," APL vice-president Eric Eng said.

As previously reported by Lloyd's List, Maersk Line took 844 of its refrigerated containers out of service due to suspected contaminated coolant after three men died in explosions while carrying out maintenance and repairs on three reefer units.

Meanwhile, CMA CGM confirmed it had quarantined 82 refrigerated containers that have undergone repairs in Vietnam since March following an explosion in a container in Qingdao, China, in October.

APL said its grounded containers had undergone refrigeration system repairs in Vietnam during 2011 but not at Cat Lai port, where the suspected contaminated coolant was found on the Maersk and CMA CGM boxes.

APL, which operates more than 50,000 refrigerated containers, said it would continue to conduct pre-trip inspections of refrigerated containers, including plugging in refrigerated units before dispatching to customers. ■

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