

26th October 2011

Published: 26 October 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.

Observers say all the major reefer machinery brands - Carrier, Daikin, Thermo King and Star Cool - are potentially affected by what is suspected to be the introduction of contaminated or otherwise unsuitable refrigerant gas into the system that causes a chemical reaction when it comes into contact with R134a, oil or air, creating a flammable/explosive mixture.

At least two Carrier ThinLINE and one Star Cool unit are reported to have suffered compressor ruptures in separate incidents in Brazil, China and Vietnam, while refrigerant gas from a Daikin LXE10E unit is said to have spontaneously combusted when exposed to air.

On 21 October, Carrier Transicold, the world's biggest reefer container machinery manufacturer, sent an urgent safety bulletin to all its authorised service centres reporting that four reefer units are now known to have experienced compressor ruptures.

Carrier said Maersk, CMA CGM, Hapag-Lloyd and others had identified at least 900 refrigeration units that they suspect may contain contaminated refrigerant and have quarantined those units.

As part of the quarantine, Maersk has given instructions to cross stuff cargo where possible, unplug the suspect reefers and store them in an isolated location with the machinery units facing away from people or traffic or stacked with the units facing each other.

Carrier advised its service centres to contact reefer customers and request that they immediately implement a reefer quarantine policy that follows the Maersk guidelines for units that have had refrigeration system work performed in Vietnam during 2011.

It also recommended that no work be carried out on any reefer unit until the reefer owner or lessee could provide service records verifying that the reefer did not have any refrigeration system service work completed in Vietnam during 2011.

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<http://www.worldcargonews.com/htm/w20111026.937700.htm>

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Monday, 31/10/2011, GMT+7

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Source: Worldcargo News - 26 October 2011

28th October 2011

Maritime Workers Threatened By Exploding Reefers

Submitted by solidarity on Fri, 2011-10-28 22:15. [Earth](#) | [Health and Safety](#) | [Maritime](#) | [Texts](#) | [Workers Defense](#)

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31 October 2011

Maersk withdraws over 800 reefer boxes after explosions

Monday 31 October 2011, 15:36

by Sylvia Traganida and Roger Hailey

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

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 whom is believed 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 Saigon 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 ten units currently 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, 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 till 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."