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Dangerous goods require digital solutions

UNDECLARED and misdeclared cargoes remain the "elephant in the room" of container safety, but better use of digital communications could help reduce the risks presented by their carriage.

"Whether by ignorance, error or pure criminality, it is concerning," TT club risk management director Peregrine Storrs-Fox told the Global Liner Shipping conference in Hamburg.

"Figures from Hapag-Lloyd's Cargo Patrol system show the industry can expect 150,000 containers per year that are more likely than not to be misdeclared goods. That should worry us."

The potential consequences of misdeclared dangerous

goods could be devastating in a port city such as Hamburg, where containers were handled in close proximity to highly populated areas, said Holman Fenwick Willian partner Craig Neame.

While the Tianjin disaster in 2015 had not led to any civilian casualties, despite occurring just 1 km from residential areas, a similar event in Hamburg could be "disastrous", Mr Neame said.

"Could another misdeclared cargo be about to go bang?" Mr Neame asked. "A dangerous cargo stored under deck could react with something around it or be inherently unstable, leading to a fire that cannot be controlled. If that got to the



deck, where a tank container with hydrogen cyanide was stored, you could have a gas cloud covering Hamburg within 30 minutes."

Preventing this type of disaster required "trust, truth and transparency" across the industry, said Mr Storrs-Fox.

"These steps can be supported by digitalisation and blockchain, but are not," he said. "The way

information flows is currently very pedestrian and very unhelpful."

He added that communications failures had been found to be a significant cause of the explosion and fire in the *MSC Flaminia* casualty.

The biggest benefit would come from better collaboration, he added.

James Baker