

Venepandi´s Circular - 036 – Reported incidents during mandatory underwater inspections in Venezuela

During the carriage of the mandatory antidrug underwater inspections prior to sailing, we´ve recorded an increasing number of alleged incidents with Masters being subject to extort and blackmail by the divers appointed by the terminals.

Since a few years ago, and given the recurring incidents with narcotics and/or other foreign objects either attached to the ship´s hull, placed in the rudder trunk or inside any grid; Venezuelan local authorities have established mandatory underwater inspections prior to sail overseas within the efforts to fight the drug smuggling. According to local regulations, the inspections must be usually covered by the terminal and the diving crew/company is also appointed by the terminal.

Unfortunately, we´ve recorded an increase number of incidents in some ports locally (specially Puerto Ordaz and Puerto la Cruz) with divers reporting, upon completion of the inspection, that either nuts, bolts and/or pin lock were found missing with the subsequent request to the Master to pay in cash to replace all the missing parts prior vessel departure or, in case of refusal, request the authorities to arrest the vessel on a basis that the underwater areas were ready to place foreign objects such as drugs.

The fact that in most cases the affected areas doesn´t seems to have rust (after checking the CCCT videos recorded), lead us to believe that the divers could be a possible cause for the parts to be missing and that therefore they be doing this practice as a way to extort the vessels and receive extra cash in foreign currency for carrying out the parts replacement. As it´s very difficult to obtain evidences to incriminate the divers, this circular is published with the purpose of providing recommendation to prevent such incidents to take place as follows:

1. If no object were found, the Master may simply refuse to pay the divers for the reinstalling of the parts as the ship-owner have the right to repair the ship anywhere else. This is the most effective way to discourage the divers to continue with this practice but requires all vessels to comply with the recommendation.
2. Conduct a verification, with the presence of the National Guard if possible, upon each diver in order to ensure that they do not carry any tool they could

VENEPANDI C.A.

C.C.C.T, Torre B, Piso 10, Oficina 1001, Av. Ernesto Blohm, Chuao, Caracas, Venezuela P.C.1064

Phones: Master: +58 212 959.3338 / +58 212 959.3352 / +58 212 959.3347

Mobiles: +58 412 222 94 94/ +58 414 2239428



The P&I Correspondent in Venezuela

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use to remove the parts and blackmail the Master later. For the inspection purposes, divers only requires the cameras and not any tools.

3. Consider to appoint private divers which would ensure the quality of the service and avoid such incidents.
4. Inform the P&I correspondent immediately in order to ensure that proper actions are taken timely and delays or arrest upon the vessels are avoided.

Please let us know should you have any further specific question about any local topic. Additionally, please remember to credit our company in case you chose to share this information.

**Carlos Carrasco
Operations Manager
Venepandi, C.A.**

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