

NNPC Loss Prevention Stowaways



Stowaway prevention and best practices: a century old problem in the modern era

Since 1748, when Spanish king Ferdinand IV criminalized freeriding on ocean going vessels, attempts by stowaways to gain entry to a vessel in order to reach a foreign country have been declared illegal. In the modern era this has become a consistent concern for shipowners, in particular in certain countries or trades.

Whilst the prevention of stowaways can be time-consuming and costly, thorough preparation is always a good investment. Based on our experience in recent years, the presence of a stowaway invariably leads to delays to the vessel, additional costs for her owners and can cause considerable stress to the vessel's crew. Whilst in some cases, particularly when stowaways are found early on, a solution can be found quickly, in other cases the stowaway may remain on board for a considerable period of time and during multiple port calls. This publication is intended to assist members in preventing stowaways from gaining entry to their vessels, limit risks and provide guidance when a stowaway is found on board.



General recommendations

- Research carried out by the International Group identified that the top-10 ports for stowaway embarkation are all situated on the African continent.
- The BIMCO Stowaway Clause for Time Charter Parties 2009 or a similar clause should be incorporated in Charter Party agreements to ensure that responsibility is clearly apportioned between the owners and charterers.
- A Designated Security Officer should be appointed on shore to provide pre-arrival intelligence to the Master and crew when calling a high-risk port. This officer should arrange for sufficient materials on board such as seals, padlocks, line guards and cluster lights, in order to effectively prevent stowaways.
- The crew should be familiar with the guidelines on how to deal with stowaways and their rights and responsibilities. They should know how to prevent and deal with potential unpredictable or violent behaviour to ensure their own and the stowaway's safety.
- Discovery of stowaways in international waters will often complicate matters and result in additional loss of time and costs. Searches and checks should be scheduled in such a manner that they are finalized before the vessel leaves the port or at least before leaving territorial waters.

Preparations prior to berthing

- The local agent should have the latest recommendations for the vessel's particular port of call and should be consulted.
- Keep the vessel and her surroundings well-lit and watched at all times.
- Regularly check for boats that are made fast to the anchor chain and minimize the possibility of entry by climbing the anchor chain.
- Ensure that there are no ropes or ladders hanging overboard.

While alongside in port

- Minimize the number of access points to the vessel, keep them well-lit and monitored. As they are a popular means of entry, the mooring lines should be fitted with appropriate rat guards.
- If allowed by the port authorities, the gangway and any ladders should be turned inboard and secured whenever possible. Where safe to do, lock and seal entrances to accommodation, engine room, storerooms, internal cabins and other spaces.
- Maintain a vigilant deck and gangway watch. Only authorized people should be allowed on board, and any person boarding and disembarking the vessel should be registered in a visitor's logbook. Ensure that everybody who registered and boarded, has eventually left the vessel.
- Closely monitor the cargo operations and keep a close eye on the cargo that is being loaded into the cargo holds. Where possible and safe, lock and seal the cargo spaces and close the hatch covers when cargo operations have been stopped or completed. Prior to loading of containers, check if their seals are intact. Inspect and seal empty containers prior to loading, and pay special attention when inspecting open-side and open-top containers.

Before departure

- A thorough and simultaneous search should be performed by the crew immediately before sailing. Check the accommodation areas, engine room, cargo spaces, and main deck. Pay close attention to spaces most suitable for hiding such as rudder trunk void spaces, funnel casings, holds vent shafts, chain lockers, deck cargo, cargo holds, lifeboats, cranes (if any), empty containers and open top containers.
- A second search should be performed after sailing and before leaving territorial waters. It is recommended that the searches are performed in teams of two and that the details and results thereof are recorded in the log book.
- The FAL Convention and ISPS Code (in particular paragraph B/9 thereof) provide appropriate measures which Shipowners and crews on board can take to reduce the risk of unauthorized persons boarding ships.



When stowaways are found

- Immediately search the area in the vicinity of where the stowaway(s) has been found in order to find out if there are other stowaways hiding and/or if papers or personal belongings of the stowaway(s) could be found. Search the stowaway(s) for papers and belongings, and confiscate any objects that may be used as a weapon. However, try not to provoke any violent behaviour.
- Where possible, stowaways should be kept separate from one another. In case of a large number of stowaways, consider dividing up the group into smaller groups as deemed appropriate in the circumstances.
- Once discovered, stowaways should always be kept locked in a secured area, preferably a suitable cabin or storeroom. Remove all loose items from this area: the stowaway(s) should never have access to razor blades, glass items (including fixed mirrors), pencils, blunt objects that could be used as a weapon, wires, ropes, etc. Keep the cabin door locked at all times, appoint a designated watchman and instruct the crew not to enter or open the cabin door under any circumstance unless for good cause when they are accompanied by a fellow crewmember.
- Members are under a lawful obligation to provide the stowaway with basic necessities such as food, water and a bed. The stowaway should have access to a toilet or be allowed to use one under crew escort.
- A stowaway should never perform any type of work on board, whether compensated or not.
- Any information about the stowaway's identity is important and will be helpful to arrange for disembarkation. Please consult the [NNPC Stowaway First response including questionnaire](#).
- The completed form should be referred to the NNPC as soon as possible to allow for a thorough review of the matter as soon as possible and to allow us to assess the best available options in order to arrange disembarkation of the stowaway at the earliest possible convenience.
- If necessary, a translator can be arranged to contact the vessel to interview the stowaway by phone or radio.

- In the event of multiple stowaways, the stowaways should (if possible) be given separate accommodation and any interviews should be conducted separately.

In summary, we recommend that members employ all possible measures to prevent stowaways from gaining access to the vessel or locate them when they do. In the event that stowaways are able to gain access, the sooner they are discovered the better the prospects of limiting delay and costs in order to arrange disembarkation. When a stowaway is found, please inform the office and/or the P&I Club immediately, provide all relevant information and await further instructions. Of course, the NNPC and our worldwide network of correspondents and lawyers are always available to advise and assist.





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If you require urgent assistance or advice the NNPC Claims team is available around the clock. Our details are as follows:

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