



South Africa upholds its strict stowaway policy

Masters and crews are urged to stay vigilant and implement proper security procedures to prevent unlawful access to their vessel while in South African ports.

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According to our local correspondent in South Africa, P&I Associates (Pty) Ltd, stowaways continue to board vessels in the country's ports far too frequently. The correspondent also confirms that the strict stowaway policy applied by the South African authorities will not change, and that the current regulations in the country are as follows:

- No stowaways will, as a general rule, be permitted to be landed in South Africa.
- Any unlawful persons that gain access to a vessel in a South African port will automatically be declared as 'stowaways' rather than 'trespassers', and the shipowner will initially be liable for the cost of their repatriation.
- However, in cases where shipowners have been able to provide photographic, video, or third-party evidence (terminal security) showing that the unlawful persons did in fact attempt to board the vessel in South Africa, local authorities have permitted the persons to be discharged directly to shore prior to the vessel's departure. Hence, the burden of proof rests on the shipowner to demonstrate that any unlawful persons found onboard can be declared as a 'trespasser'.

At the time of writing, it is also a requirement that any 'trespassers' must be tested for COVID-19 and show a negative result before being allowed to disembark from the vessel.

Assessing the stowaway risk

Mitigating and managing the risk of stowaways getting onboard is an important part of shipboard operations and of fulfilling the obligations under the International Ship and Port Security (ISPS) Code. The requirements, actions and tools for this key security task should be clearly stated within the ship security plan (SSP) and include access control and onboard searches. Prior to setting a vessel's formal security level, the local environment and security arrangements in each port should be carefully considered and should include factors such as lighting, facility access, the vessel's area of operation, etc. As a means of gathering more intelligence, we also suggest discussing the stowaway problem with the vessels' local agents, as well as with other masters. Doing so could provide valuable and up to date information, not only on current regional hot spots but also the most common methods used by stowaways to gain access to vessels in a specific port.

While vessels are vulnerable to persons attempting to stow away at virtually all ports, collective data from the International Group of P&I Clubs (IG) shows that South African ports have generally been hot spots for stowaway activity, particularly Durban as it is one of the busiest ports in Africa. The correspondent further explains that, in South African ports, stowaways commonly gain access to vessels by:

- climbing up the mooring lines,

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adequately briefed and trained to perform the tasks assigned to them.

Information received with thanks from P&I Associates (Pty) Ltd., Durban, South Africa.

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