



POTENTIAL EXPLOSION HAZARD INVOLVING REFRIGERATED SHIPPING CONTAINERS

U.S. ports are on the alert for refrigerated shipping containers that are reported to have exploded, resulting in the death of two mechanics in Vietnam and another mechanic in Brazil.

The containers, known as “reefers,” were originally processed in Vietnam. The cause of the explosions is suspected to be a faulty coolant, which could have been installed in up to 8,000 containers.

Precautions, such as flagging containers imported from Vietnam, are being taken to prevent explosions in the U.S. The Port of Oakland shut down two of nine terminals and port workers are reportedly refusing to work on containers processed in Vietnam.

Concerns, however, extend beyond the ports and to the general public. Reefers of this nature are often shipped out to other parts of the country by means of train or truck.

A representative from Maersk Line, the company whose containers blew up, has assured that new precautions have been put into place to prevent further explosion incidents from happening.

Maersk Line has removed all 844 reefer containers in its fleet that have undergone repairs in Vietnam since February.

“While we cannot state with total certainty that we have identified the root cause, we are confident that we have taken the necessary precautions to avoid further incidents,” said Soren Toft, head of center operations, inland terminals and equipment at Maersk.

Multiple international shipping agencies are conducting a comprehensive review of refrigerated containers processed at a Vietnam port, the Pacific Maritime Association said in a statement, after some units exploded, reportedly killing two mechanics in Vietnam and one in Brazil.

Besides the inherent risk for longshoremen -- who in Oakland, Calif., have even refused to move containers processed in Vietnam -- industry workers expressed concern for the general public once these faulty containers, known as “reefers,” are unloaded and shipped out on trucks and freight trains.

The station reported that authorities think the containers have been contaminated with bad coolant, which can become explosive when exposed to air.

The refrigeration units being segregated were processed at the Port of Kat Lai in Vietnam, the Pacific Maritime Association statement said. Any unit that was transported through Vietnam is being flagged upon arrival in at U.S. ports on the West Coast.

Chris O'Neil, a commander from the U.S. Coast Guard, said the guard is working with the shipping industry to identify containers in inventory that dates back months. He could not speculate how many containers went through Vietnam ports during that time.

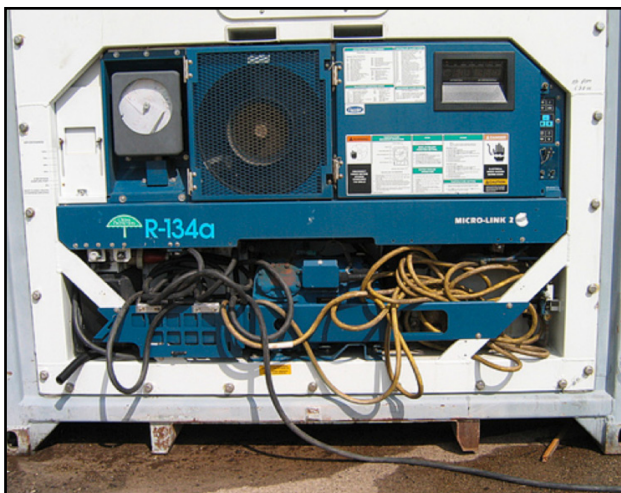
The Port of Oakland shutdown two of its seven terminals Tuesday due to concern about several ocean vessels that had the potential to be carrying faulty containers, Robert Bernardo, a spokesman from the port said. The port was fully operating on Wednesday.

The Coast Guard said it is working closely with shippers and port officials around the nation to identify any potentially faulty containers, isolate them, and ensure they are rendered safe.

On Oct. 18, Maersk Line alerted the World Shipping Councils Safe Transport of Containers Working Group that refrigeration units have exploded in three instances for no apparent reason, The World Cargo News reported.

Source: <http://www.longshoreshippingnews.com/>

<http://www.foxnews.mobi/quickPage.html?page=38321&content=59823362&pageNum=-1>



Close-up of a typical refrigeration unit



40 foot "Reefer" shipping container

Analysis:

Somewhere between 11 million and 15 million containers enter this country every year. That's an average of about 35,000 every day. The suspect containers may not enter any ports in New York State; however, a significant number could be transported to or through NYS on trucks or by rail. Depending on the type of refrigeration and insulation, a "reefer" can keep the contents refrigerated or frozen for 10 to 30 days. It is conceivable that food items being shipped from the Pacific Rim could transit to or through NYS.



Distributed by the
NYS Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Services

**OFFICE OF
FIRE PREVENTION
& CONTROL**

phone 518.474.6746
fax 518.474.3240
email fire@dhses.ny.gov