

SHIPPING

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# MARITIME



REVIEW AFRICA

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# SAFETY

Improving health and safety standards in the maritime industry

# HOW CLEAN ARE MY HOLDS?

*Over the years we have investigated numerous disputes resulting from ships' holds being failed by experienced marine surveyors on the basis that they are not clean enough to load the booked cargoes. It is standard practice that, on arrival at the load port, the condition of the ship's holds will be inspected and checked. And, it is quite common for marine surveyors to fail holds. This then results in a dispute between shippers, owners and charterers over the standard of cleanliness that is expected in the holds.*

## Avoiding contamination

Many vessels specifically call at Richards Bay, for example, to load Zircon, Rutile, Titanium, Ilmenite, Synthetic Rutile, and Leucoxene. These cargoes are known in the industry as mineral sands. They are high value cargoes and are very sensitive to contamination.

These refined products are utilised in a number of specialist industrial processes. Any form of contamination can be harmful to them and lead to large claims. They are also harmful to each other and, therefore, proper separation of the cargoes is vital.

In order to avoid contamination claims at the discharge ports it is imperative that the ship's holds are clean and suitable to receive the cargoes.

The contract of affreightment, for example a charterparty, will include a clause stating that the ship's holds must be clean. The clause usually stipulates that the holds must be free of all previous cargo residues, rust scale, and flaking paint.

Ships carry a variety of cargoes which are loaded and discharged in many ways and these cargoes can cause damage. The holds can also be damaged through the use of mechanical equipment like grabs or be knocked with the use of payloaders. It is, therefore, imperative that a shipowner properly maintains the ship's holds since they are the life blood and the very purpose of why ships are required.

## Potential losses are high

When a ship's holds are failed, the vessel is immediately taken off hire and the port or terminal may request that the vessel vacate the berth and proceed to the anchorage or to a layby berth, if one is available, in order to clean its holds. The losses which a ship owner may face can be enormous, especially through lost hire.

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Hold cleanliness disputes can be avoided through due diligence. A prudent ship owner should carry out enquiries regarding the type of cargoes to be loaded on his vessel and any requirements with regard to the safe carriage of those cargoes. The ship owner should carefully consider the quality of his vessel in relation to the charterparty terms, especially with regard to hold cleanliness.

A wise shipowner should rather avoid a charterparty with strict hold cleanliness terms if there is a real possibility that the ships holds will be failed because of previous cargo residues, rust scale, and flaking paint.

Although the charter may be lucrative, one must balance this revenue against the risk of delays, hold cleaning expenses, off hire or even having the charter cancelled and then being sued for breach of contract and resultant losses.

Ship operators often expect the crew to clean the ships holds prior to loading the next consignments. If there are residues of previous cargoes, rust scale, and flaking paint under the hatch covers, coamings, and under deck spaces, then it becomes very difficult for the crew to reach those areas.

It would also be dangerous for the crew to attempt cleaning these difficult to reach places whilst the vessel is at anchorage and the ship is rolling. Proper staging may need to be erected which has to be properly braced. The best option is often to try and get to a lay-by berth and use mechanical lifts and equipment. At the end of the day, this may prove to be cheaper for the ship operator when you

measure the same against lost hire.

## Important checklist

If a ship is booked to load mineral sands then ship operators should be aware of the following:

- All loose rust scale must be removed. Special attention should be given to the undersides of the hatch covers, coaming faces, the underdeck spaces at both ends of the hold, the undersides of any topside tanks, the inner surfaces of the ship's shell plating, the "hidden flanges" and the upper and lower frame brackets, the bulkheads, ladder flanges, ventilator trunkings, ledges, grills and the tank top.
- If the vessel is loading Zircon, shippers will require that all hard rust is also removed from the tank top, lower hopper sides and lower bulkhead areas.
- All flaking paint must be removed from the same areas listed above.

The reason for the above is that during loading or discharge or vibrations during the voyage the above rust and paint can fall into the cargo and, therefore, contaminate it.

It should be noted that one cannot simply paint over any loose rust and old paint as a cleaning method. The shipper's requirements for mineral sands are that no painting should be done 10 days before loading.

Many ship operators claim foul when the ships holds are rejected mistakenly believing that the holds have been failed by the shipper or charterer because the booked cargo is unavailable. These cases are very few and far between. It is usually only once all the residues, loose rust and flaking paint is collected that this belief is rectified.

Marine surveyors should carry out hold inspections in a professional and practical manner. They should be experienced in the composition of each type of mineral sand and the practical conditions that can arise during loading, discharge and transportation by sea. They should use this experience in a practical and qualified manner. □

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