

Stowaways in the steering gear trunk



A container vessel had departed from Lagos and the next port of call was in Malaysia. Before departure, the crew performed a stowaway search as per the Ship Security Plan. No stowaways were found. The vessel departed and after disembarkation another search was carried out. Still no stowaways were found.

The following day the Bosun heard knocking sounds coming from the hull in the steering gear room. He informed the Master straight away. The crew started to investigate the sounds and could hear knocking coming from what they believed was the rudder trunk.

There was no access to the rudder trunk as it is space taken up by the rudder stock. The rudder trunk is only accessible from the outside of the vessel. This was a so-called unbalanced rudder, which means that the rudder stock is attached aft of the rudder hinges. The hinges are at the forward end of the rudder. The vessel was in open sea and the Master brought the vessel to a stop. The crew lowered a camera on the stern to see if they could see anything by the rudder. When they recovered the camera and watched

what they had filmed they could see three people sitting on the rudder.

The crew lowered the rescue boat and picked up the three men. The stowaways had used a small rowing boat to reach the vessel and had then managed to climb up the rudder and then into the rudder trunk. So that the stowaways could disembark, the vessel had to divert to Cape Town.

There is never access to the rudder trunk from the inside of the vessel as it is just an open void considered part of the hull. It is extremely unlikely that a person would be able to sit on the rudder and not be washed out of the rudder trunk during a sea passage. If people in the rudder trunk are not found before departure or shortly after departure, they will most likely be lost at sea.

To prevent stowaways achieving access, please consider the following if the vessel is in a port with a high risk of stowaways;

- Inspect the rudder and if possible the rudder trunk with the rescue boat before departure if the rudder is above the waterline.
- Install protective grating or steel bars onto the steering gear trunk to prevent access from the rudder.