

Venepandi's Circular - 021 – Oil Leakages at Maracaibo Lake causing hull stains

All concerning parties should be aware that the presence of oil leakages in Maracaibo Lake is a frequent issue and most vessels transiting this area are subject to oil stains on the hulls with the subsequent loss of time due the necessary cleaning arrangement.

Oil leakages are a recurrent and unfortunately very frequent issue all over Maracaibo lake including the ports of El Tablazo, El Guamache, Maracaibo and all terminals within the lake. The cause of the leakages, according to all the information collected and close study of each precedent, is that Maracaibo lake (at Zulia state, as the second biggest oil producing region in the country) is full of underwater pipes. Unfortunately, the oil state company (PDVSA) doesn't conduct the proper maintenance to those pipes and leakages at different point occurs with the subsequent environmental affectation and risk of damages to the ship's transiting the area.

Once a ship's hull gets stained with oil, a vessel local agent should proceed to liaise with PDVSA and obtain their agreement that the hull will be cleaned at their expenses and to accept full liability caused by the oil stain. Without conducting these arrangements, we've noted that PDVSA would not conduct the cleaning nor pay for all the expenses related to the cleaning

Back on 2010, Maracaibo's harbormaster forbade all cleaning activities inside the maracaibo lake given the environmental damage of such cleaning operations (related to the products that should be used), and therefore all hull cleanings are usually conducted at Amuay bay a few miles away from the Maracaibo lake channel.

Additionally, concerning parties should not agree to cover the cost of cleaning under any pretext, because it runs the risk of not recovering the money spent due to the financial crisis in the terminal owner.

Finally, depending on the vessel's further ports of call, the ship may decide to conduct the ceaning at any local port in order to avoid potential demurrages, but should avoid leaving the country with the hull stained considering the risk of potential fines by overseas authorities that may notice about the oill in the hull and thus consider the related enviromental damage.

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The P&I Correspondent in Venezuela

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Should you have any question about this or any other matter, please don't hesitate on contacting us. In case you choose to share this information, please don't forget to credit our company.

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