

Venezuela – robbery of vessels in port

Introduction

The risk of armed robbery is still of concern for vessels anchoring in the areas surrounding Puerto La Cruz and Barcelona City off the north coast of Venezuela. Gard would like to take the opportunity to warn our Members and Clients about this problem and to repeat some of the advice provided by our local correspondent and authorities as to precautionary measures to be taken by vessels calling at ports in the relevant areas.

The situation

Reported incidents involve intruders, usually approaching the vessel in small fishing boats, climbing aboard the vessels during the night while the vessel is at anchor. The intruders' intentions are to rob the vessel and its crew members of all valuables. During the robbery, crew members have been threatened, beaten and even attacked with knives and guns.

According to Gard's correspondent in Venezuela, extra precautions should be taken when anchoring in the proximity of the Jose (Bahia de Barcelona) and Pertigalete terminals or close to the port of Guanta and the Guaraguao terminal in the Bahia de Pozuelos.

Our correspondent in Venezuela also states that a meeting was arranged not long ago between the port authorities in Venezuela and the shipping community to discuss the negative development in the above mentioned regions and the potential implementation of precautionary measures to prevent robberies. Reportedly, one of the measures suggested by the authorities was to always anchor in the Bahia de Pozuelos area where the authorities had implemented regular surveillance.

Recommendations

In summary, the following precautionary measures should be considered by vessels calling at ports in the areas surrounding Puerto La Cruz and Barcelona City off the north coast of Venezuela:

- As far as practicable, avoid anchoring altogether by adjusting the itinerary to enable direct berthing operations. If anchoring is required, anchor in the Bahia de Pozuelos area where authorities are said to carry out regular surveillance.
- Maintain surveillance from the main deck and on the bridge at all times and pay particular attention to small crafts with numerous personnel onboard, especially during the hours of darkness. The area around the vessel should be floodlit if possible.
- As far as practicable, protect and/or remove all means that could make boarding of the vessel easier (e.g. raise the accommodation ladder when not in use).
- If suspicious crafts are detected in the vicinity of the vessel, use light and sound signals to indicate that the craft has been discovered and to alert other vessels in the area. Consider if the authorities should be informed on VHF radio channel 16 already at this stage.
- If boarding is threatened or attempted, then immediately notify the harbor master and the vessel's local port agent.
- If intruders succeed in boarding the vessel, crew members must not offer resistance. The intruders may be armed and tend to behave aggressively and violently in these situations.
- In the event of a robbery, report the incident to the local P&I correspondent and instruct them to secure external assistance, e.g. from the National Guard.

Members and Clients are encouraged to follow the above advice and should also check with local sources of information and/or their local agents before anchoring in the mentioned areas.

We would like to thank Gard's correspondent in Venezuela, Globalpandi, S.A., for their assistance with the above information.