

Box Clever: Tackling the basic working practises on container ships that when ignored cause big problems!



Stay cool by following the Six P's!

Guidance on the basic checks that should be performed when loading and carrying reefer containers.

Refrigerated containers - or reefers - are carried on most container vessels. And whilst the equipment and its systems may be complex and require the officers on board to be trained in how to monitor and maintain them, quite often it is the basics that cause issues.

Here we will look at these basic principles and remind you of some simple checks that could help avoid big cargo claims. Let's look at the 6 P's for carrying reefer containers!



PAPERWORK!

The crew generally relies on the loading computer to check their loading plans. The plans are loaded onto the computer using BAPLIE files, a universally adopted electronic format for sharing information. If the central planner inputs into the BAPLIE file a set-point temperature within the text box, this will indicate to the crew that the reefer container requires plugging-in on loading. If no temperature is specified, then the reefer will appear as an empty or dry reefer, as shown below:

0380282	0380082	0380182	0380282	0380082	0380182
TPP/WVB	TPP/WVB	TPP/WVB	TPP/WVB	TPP/WVB	TPP/WVB
MWMU FR	MWCU FR	MNBU FR	MWMU FR	MWCU FR	MNBU FR
6432408	6857399	3015369	6432408	6857399	3015369
28.4 45R1	28.4 45R1	28.4 45R1	28.4 45R1	28.4 45R1	28.4 45R1
-20.0:CEL	-20.0:CEL	-20.0:CEL	Dry reefer	-20.0:CEL	-20.0:CEL

There have been instances where the planner has mistakenly failed to insert a set-point temperature, and this has led to the reefer being left off-power for the duration of the voyage. A similar problem occurs where the incorrect temperature is inserted, and although the reefer will be connected to a power supply when loaded, the set point might be altered by the crew to this new incorrect value.

The ship's crew can help prevent this by always cross-checking the BAPLIE file data against the reefer manifests or "specials" list provided. These documents give the crew the most accurate information about the reefers, such as temperature set point, contents, vent position and any controlled atmosphere requirements.

Any discrepancies in the number of reefers to be carried or temperature set points should be fully investigated and clarified with the planners before the reefers are loaded on board.

POSITION

Reefers often contain high value cargo, so it is important to monitor them frequently to make sure they are running properly at the correct set point. However, there may be commercial pressure to carry more reefers, resulting in some being allocated stowage positions that do not allow safe access or easy observation.

Such commercial pressure can be difficult to resist, but the master should raise these concerns with the relevant parties.

Reefers stowed underdeck should be allowed sufficient air supply, with hold ventilators opened as appropriate.



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POWER

Poorly maintained ship's auxiliary engines are likely to suffer from reduced generating capacity, either through a drop in individual engine performance or having one or more engines out of service. This can mean the vessel cannot provide enough power for both essential services and the reefers simultaneously.

Ensure planned maintenance is carried out properly and conduct regular performance monitoring, promptly reporting and addressing any identified defects. Compare with past data so any trends indicating a drop in performance can be noted. If a generator is out of service, ensure class is advised, especially if a deck generator is considered as a stand in.

PLUGGING AND UNPLUGGING

When reefers are loaded on board, they should be plugged in as quickly as possible. This requires the crew to maintain a vigilant cargo watch out on deck.

When reefers are loaded, check the reefer's general condition, including:

- Are the doors in apparent good condition and are they properly shut and sealed?
- Are there any bad smells? This could be a sign that the contents are thawing.
- Are there any obvious defects to the plug or power cable?

When the reefer is plugged in, carry out the following:

- Check alarm status
- Record the time plugged in
- Check the temperature set points
- Check and record the running temperatures (supply and return) – if this is significantly different to the set point, report it and seek a decision on whether it should be discharged.

Prior to discharge, reefers should be left on-power until as late as possible. Keep a record of the time they were unplugged and discharged.

PASSAGE

On passage, reefers should be monitored locally, regardless of any remote monitoring abilities. Ensure all are checked at the interval specified by either the SMS or any special instructions. Maintain accurate logs of these checks, recording any issues found.

PARTS

There should be adequate spares carried on board for all the types of reefer to allow trained crew to carry out repairs when required. It is therefore important that an accurate record is kept of what stock is on board. If crew find that spares on board are insufficient, alert the ship manager so remedial action can be taken.

USEFUL LINKS

North's Signals article on cross-checking your BAPLIE: www.nepia.com/articles/reefer-containers-avoid-claims-by-cross-checking

North's Signals article on generator maintenance: www.nepia.com/articles/generators-capacity-to-cope

North's reefer container briefing: www.nepia.com/publications/refrigerated-containers-briefing

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