

Containership fires: it is time to take action, says IUMI



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This year has already seen an alarming number of container ship fires including Yantian Express, APL Vancouver, Grande America, E.R. Kobe and KMTC Hong Kong. The escalation is of growing concern to IUMI (International Union of Marine Insurance) who used a recent forum to call for an urgent improvement to onboard firefighting systems.



At a conference in Arendal, Norway, organised by marine insurer and P&I Club, Gard, and attended by IMO, flag states, shipowners, salvors, class, and insurers, IUMI strengthened its position on this global issue.

Helle Hammer, Chair of IUMI's Policy Forum explains:

“Fire-fighting capabilities onboard containerships are deficient and we need to see more headway to improve the safety of the crew, the environment, the cargo and the ships themselves. Mis and non-declaration of cargo has serious safety implications and is the root cause behind these tragic incidents. There is agreement among experts that the current means of controlling a fire in the cargo hold are of little effect. The safety objectives set out in SOLAS do not seem to be met, and in light of the various recent casualties the time for action is now.”

During the IMO's 101st Maritime Safety Committee (MSC) meeting in June 2019, IUMI raised its concerns and received support from various quarters, including IACS. Now, in partnership with the German flag state, IUMI is calling for additional support from flag administrations and other stakeholders to bring this issue to IMO's agenda in 2020.

In 2017 IUMI published a [position paper](#) to raise a variety of concerns including inadequate fire detection and onboard firefighting systems both on deck and under deck; and the need to revise SOLAS. This position paper will provide the foundation for the IMO proposal.

“Our position paper recommends that firefighting systems should be arranged to segregate the ship into fire compartments where the fire can be isolated to prevent it from spreading. Onboard systems could then cool the containers and allow them to burn out in a controlled manner. Fixed monitors to adequately attack the fire and improved fire detection system are further measures proposed to allow for an

appropriate response mechanism. Better prevention measures must also address the concerning rise in cargo misdeclaration. We are encouraged to see larger carriers already beginning to crack down on this problem”, says Hammer.

“The sad reality is that we can no longer sit idle. Containerships are increasing in size and complexity and this will only exacerbate the problem. This is an issue that affects the entire maritime industry and IUMI is calling for all stakeholders to work together and encourage IMO to:

- strengthen fire protection in the cargo area of container vessels;
- amend SOLAS by explicitly including active and/or passive fire protection on board new container vessels; and
- consider the need to address the firefighting equipment of existing container vessels.”

The full position paper is available from [IUMI's website](#).

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Notes to editors:

The International Union of Marine Insurance (IUMI) represents 43 national and marine market insurance and reinsurance associations. Operating at the forefront of marine risk, it gives a unified voice to the global marine insurance market through effective representation and lobbying activities. As a forum for the exchange of ideas and best practice, IUMI works to raise standards across the industry and provides opportunities for education and the collection and publication of industry statistics. IUMI is headquartered in Hamburg and traces its roots back to 1874.

More information can be found at www.iumi.com