

Maritime anti-terror progress adrift as July 1 deadline looms

Only 20% of world's shippers meet tough security measures

BY STEFANO AMBROGI

LONDON • Alarm bells are ringing across the trillion-dollar world shipping industry as it scrambles to comply with a July 1 deadline for some of the toughest security measures since the Second World War.

The United Nations' security requirements, the International Ship and Port Facility Security code, are mandatory for all merchant ships and ports engaged in global trade.

Yet only a fifth of the world's merchant fleet is compliant with the code, due in just 40 working days, leading industry figures say.

The United States, fearful of a seaborne attack against one of its ports by al Qaeda, has said it will strictly enforce the code and expects other nations to do so, raising fears that the measures could slow or even harm world trade.

Andy Mitchell, head of the maritime security program at ship safety and classification societies Lloyd's Register, told Reuters that of the 30,000 ships trading internationally needing to be security-certified, about 20% had now been approved, up from around 3% in mid-March.

"There are going to be problems. Time is running out," Mr. Mitchell said.

It was unclear how many of the 6,000 key ports involved had brought into force the new measures, said Lee Adamson of the UN's International Maritime Organization.

He, too, saw shipping compliance currently at 20%.

The measures apply to all ships — oil tankers, general cargo, container or passenger ships — engaged in international trade.

The code also stipulates that ports visited in the complex web of trade need to be security certified and vessels required to keep a log of the last 10 ports they visit.

The U.S. Coastguard has repeatedly warned that ships, including oil tankers, that do not have security plans in place or that call at a non-compliant port could be denied entry, or in extreme circumstances be impounded.

In April, U.S. authorities said every ship seeking to call at one of its ports would be boarded and thoroughly checked from July 1.

According to the United Nations over 90% of world trade is transported by sea, including crucial commodities such as oil, gas, coal, iron ore and grains.

Leading maritime security firms that are advising signatory nations on implementing the measures at ports have told Reuters that many, mostly in the developing world and including some leading OPEC oil exporters, are struggling to meet the deadline.

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