

Namibia - Loss Prevention Notice about Ignition of Containerized Charcoal
(as advised by P&I Associates (Pty) Ltd.)

We were notified by a master on board a container vessel regarding a fire which broke out on board the vessel. The vessel loaded charcoal in Walvis Bay, Namibia. The lumpy charcoal was loaded inside bags which were then stuffed inside a container. Certificates were presented to the vessel that the cargo had passed the UN test criteria for self-heating cargo and was described as non-hazardous. The vessel departed from Walvis Bay with the charcoal stuffed into containers that that were stowed on deck. Approximately 12 hours after the vessel had commenced her sea passage for Cape Town, smoke was seen coming from one of the containers of charcoal and the fire quickly spread to adjacent charcoal containers.

The crew were able to fight the fire and the vessel made for the nearest port for assistance. Thankfully the cargo had been loaded on deck so arrangements could be made at short notice to discharge the cargo ashore in order to save life and property.

This is the first time we have been advised of an incident involving Namibian charcoal and the South African Maritime Safety Authority (SAMSA) have also confirmed that they have no reports of any such prior incidents involving this type of cargo. If any member is loading charcoal from Namibia then we would recommend that the shippers advise when the cargo sample was tested and when the cargo was stuffed into the containers. The IMSBC code provides that the weathering certificate and UN self-heating test should be carried out not less than 13 days prior to loading on board the vessel.

For the time being, we recommend that charcoal containers are stowed on deck and not higher than the second tier and preferable where there is easy access to them should a problem arise. We would also suggest that the containers are checked at regular intervals when the crew are making their rounds. We understand that the cargo was destined for various destinations and that the cargo was being transhipped in Cape Town. Accordingly our advice applies to all vessels that might carry this type of cargo.