

Oil stains within the port of Maracaibo

The Lake Maracaibo is an important loading place for the Venezuelan oil with approximately 11,000 active wells and 45,000 kilometers of underwater pipelines, where about 1.5 million barrels are exported through main terminals located at Puerto Miranda, La Salina and Bajo Grande. Staining of hulls with oil has been also a regular issue inside the lake, a problem that has increased in the last months. In the past these incidents affected only the vessels calling at the terminals run by PDVSA the oil state-owned company, but the problem has expanded recently and it is affecting now the vessels calling at the commercial port as well, commonly known as the port of Maracaibo under the administration of Bolivariana de Puertos, S.A. (Bolipuertos).

In recent years there has been a recurring problem of oil pollution in the lake that seems to stem from micro-spills from operations at the oil installations. In some terminals controlled by PDVSA as La Salina for example, these frequent operational spills cause staining problems to hulls regularly. Over time that oil has accumulated at many areas of the lake and seasonal phenomena of the lake, as well as currents, heavy rain and the formation of Lemna during summer months, create large assemblies of oiled debris which sometimes can reach other non-oil installations like the commercial port of Maracaibo. Unfortunately, there is no an official statement on the source of these spills.

When this occurs to vessels berthed at the oil terminals, the state oil company PDVSA normally undertakes the cost and logistics for the cleaning, but when it happens at the commercial port it becomes difficult to get the corresponding commitment from PDVSA or Bolipuertos as the agency in charge of the administration of the public port.

Regardless who will undertake the cleaning, either PDVSA, the owners or charterers, it is important to point out that the hull cleaning is not allowed inside the lake, since it has been always performed out of the Lake Maracaibo in the anchorage area of Guaranao Port - Punto Fijo. It should be emphasized that even where PDVSA undertakes the cleaning in writing, this is subject to availability of the cleaning team what it may depend on the number of ships in the queue, so cleaning does not necessarily takes place immediately, the former resulting in delays difficult to recover later.

Consequently, Members calling at the port of Maracaibo are suggested to promptly contact the agents and correspondents for assistance, as well as discussing with charterers, if needed, alternative arrangements for private cleaning.

Should you need any assistance or further information regarding the topic stated above, please feel free to contact:

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