



Chapter 52 – Cargo Pre-loading Surveys

Instructing a surveyor to 'carry out a pre-loading survey' is inadequate and leaves the surveyor in doubt as to how far their duties extend.

In most contracts of carriage, the shipowner's responsibilities begin at the time of loading and it is, therefore, important to inspect the cargo at this stage. Pre-shipment inspection of cargo is undertaken to determine and document the condition of the cargo at this time. This inspection is commonly referred to as the pre-loading survey. This survey can be carried out by the ship's Master and officers, or the owner's representatives or surveyors instructed by the owner, depending on the trade and nature of the cargo. If the cargo is not as described in the shipping documentation, a decision will have to be made whether to reject the cargo or accept the cargo and adequately describe any differences on the mate's receipts and bills of lading (B/Ls). Early notification of any deficiencies to the shippers is desirable, together with the owner's intentions to either reject the cargo, or clause the mate's receipts and B/Ls. This notification can be given direct to the shippers but is more commonly given to the agents, stevedores or charterers, depending on the owner's contractual relations.

Masters and deck officers employed by owners who trade their ships in liner services are usually trained to undertake pre-shipment inspections. Liner companies usually employ cargo superintendents, who can be called upon to assist if there is a problem.

They may also have their own network of contracted surveyors who can be called upon quickly if an unusual cargo is to be loaded. Ships employed in the main bulk trades, (oil, grain, ore, etc) or specialised ships such as gas carriers and RoRo vessels, usually have competently trained Masters and officers on board to take care of any pre-shipment inspections that are necessary. However, problems may arise if a tramp operator is chartered to carry, for example, steel products, paper products or breakbulk cargoes, but the Master and the ship's officers have little or no experience of these products. In many instances, loading operations commence immediately upon the ship's arrival and there is little time for the ship's personnel to inspect the cargo.

The ship's personnel may be unfamiliar with the port and the system of loading, they may not know the agents, who almost always will be the charterer's agents, and they will be put under pressure by the charterers and possibly a cargo superintendent employed by the charterer to load their ship as quickly as possible. In these circumstances, employment of a competent local surveyor should be considered.

If owners decide they require a surveyor to attend their ship to carry out a pre-loading survey, the instructions given should be comprehensive, precise and given as early as possible to allow sufficient time for the surveyor to conduct an efficient survey. This will avoid confusion and disagreement at a later date when the surveyor presents their report and invoice. A general instruction that the surveyor should 'carry out a pre-loading survey' is inadequate and means the surveyor has to decide the extent of their duties. In these circumstances, the surveyor would simply inspect the cargo on the quay, possibly prior to the ship's arrival if all the cargo had been delivered, and report to the Master on its condition, presenting a written report. Most surveyors would take their duties a little further and advise the Master on the clausing of the mate's receipts and they might offer guidance on loading and stowage if it was requested by the Master. More precise advance instructions would, however, avoid any potential confusion and ambiguity. Instructing and informing the surveyor should therefore include the following:

Relevant details in the contracts of carriage (charterparties)

These include:

- Clauses relating to damaged cargo, eg sometimes clauses state that damaged cargo should not be loaded or that specific clausing only is permitted on the B/Ls
- clauses relating to the responsibility for loading and stowage
- clauses relating to the issue of the mate's receipts and B/Ls.

Precise instructions on the survey

- The surveyor should be instructed whether the cargo is to be inspected on the quay just before loading or in the transit shed or elsewhere prior to the ship's arrival, etc. The nature of the cargo and time factor will probably determine this. In many cases, the owners, charterer or ship's agent will not know where the cargo is stored in the port or when it is to be delivered, so the surveyor should be instructed to survey all cargo to be loaded as near to the time of shipment as possible
- instruction is also required on the information to be given to the Master before the signing of the mate's receipts and whether the surveyor should formulate suitable clauses relating to any damage. Usually, the surveyor should be instructed to be present when the Master signs the shipping documents. At this time, the surveyor

can assist with any language problems and any disputes with shippers, agents or charterers in the clausing of mate's receipts and/or B/L.

Other additional services connected with loading

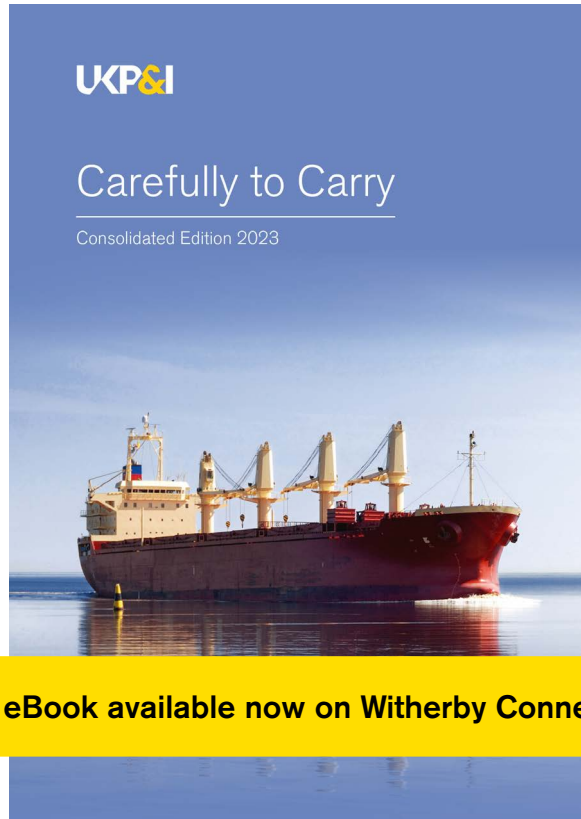
- Inspection of ship's hatch covers and ventilation system. (The findings of this inspection should be provided in a separate report or confidential side letter. This is to avoid any adverse information being disclosed if the pre-loading report is used in a cargo dispute)
- advising the Master on loading, stowage and securing
- monitoring the loading, stowage and securing
- advising and reporting on handling damage caused by stevedores
- advising on the tallying of the cargo and the issue of cargo documentation
- advising whether the cargo can be loaded in rain.

If early instructions are given, the surveyor will have time to contact the agents and stevedores to find out the exact nature of the cargo, when it is arriving at the loading berth and the proposed stowage on the ship.

Most shipowners will be aware that the employment of a competent surveyor for a 'precautionary' pre-loading survey in certain circumstances can eliminate or reduce problems and claims. The UK P&I Club and correspondents can assist and advise owners in arranging these surveys and in some exceptional circumstances will pay for the survey. This is particularly the case with finished or semi-finished steel products when the Club will always pay for a pre-loading survey if notified by the owners but not any associated services.



Price: £95



This comprehensive publication, compiled by the UK P&I Club, details best practice for the carriage, loading and storage requirements of a wide range of cargoes. It also contains essential information on draught surveys and preparing cargo plans.

Outlining and expanding on all major international cargo regulations and guidelines, it also includes detailed checklists, information on draught surveys and guides to preparing cargo plans. Cargoes covered include timber, gas, grain, steel and other metals, bulk goods and refrigerated goods.