

## CREW HEALTH ADVICE

# Complications of CBD use by seafarers

UK P&I Members recently brought our attention to issues surrounding cannabidiol (CBD) usage by a crew member which resulted in a failed drugs test. The CBD oil had been purchased and consumed by a seafarer as an over-the-counter supplement. The seafarer had not disclosed usage. The crew member later tested positive on a random drugs screen. This has raised questions over CBD product usage onboard. As a result of this case the UK P&I Club are issuing a cautionary note to Members and crew regarding the use of CBD products.

In recent years, the use of over the counter Cannabidiol products has increased drastically. These products are now available in many convenience stores and online marketplaces. Although these products have been known to have some health benefits, their regulation and legal status is still unclear when it comes to the maritime industry. Ship owners need to be aware of the potential risks that come with consumption of CBD products and the implications of carrying them onboard.

CBD is a natural compound derived from the hemp plant, flowers or leaves. The ambiguous regulations of the C. Sativa plant has created a lack of clarity among the CBD oil products being sold in the market (Thakkar K, et al 2021). Due to difficulties in isolating CBD from other cannabinoids, consumer CBD products also contain varying amounts of trans-delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol-C5 ( $\Delta^9$ -THC) and other cannabinoids present in cannabis that are controlled under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 (MDA, 1971). "While as an isolated substance, CBD is not a controlled drug, there is recent evidence that many of the products available contain controlled cannabinoids and that it is difficult to isolate pure CBD" (Malthouse K, 2021).

Currently, CBD is used in various forms such as oils, tinctures, balms, edibles, vapes, tablets and more (EMCDDA, 2019). CBD has become increasingly popular for its potential therapeutic effects, particularly for those seeking relief from pain, inflammation, anxiety, insomnia, and other conditions. Research shows that using CBD may have positive

effects on reducing inflammation and pain management, it may also have potential benefits when it comes to relieving anxiety and stress levels. However, more research is needed before we can draw any definitive conclusions about its benefits or risks for people's health.

## Legal Considerations

The UK Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) highlights the personal responsibility of seafarers to notify employers when medication likely to affect performance is being taken. The MCA recommends that companies develop management systems to minimise the risk of adverse effects of medication at sea (MCA, 2005). As such, it is important that ship owners ensure that all personnel onboard their vessel

remain compliant with the MCA's regulations while they are at sea.

There is some evidence that CBD can be converted to (THC), a Schedule 1 substance under the United Nations Convention on Psychotropic Substances 1971 (WHO, 2018). Consideration is needed regarding the seemingly legal handling of a potentially convertible, and therefore illegal, substance on board. This can pose a risk for ship owners and seafarers if they are in direct opposition of the countries laws they are entering. Response to the use of CBD varies country to country and flag state to flag state. This is highlighted by the advisory notice from the U.S Coast Guard (USCG) urging extreme caution when considering the use of any hemp or CBD product. Such use could result in the loss of their merchant mariner credential and



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# CREW HEALTH ADVICE

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immediate removal from safety sensitive duties aboard a vessel (USCG, 2020).

When it comes to UK law and health advice concerning CBD use there are considerations: First of all, only products made from EU approved hemp (containing 0.2% or less THC) are legally allowed in the UK; second, companies selling CBD products in the UK must comply with certain legal requirements set out by the UK Governments Home Office (UK Home Office, 2020). It is important to understand that buying CBD oil or other products online is unregulated and may be in direct contravention of these laws.

## Medical Considerations

The medical considerations associated with CBD use among seafarers also need to be taken into account. There have been some studies, which suggest that CBD can help alleviate anxiety, pain and inflammation but further research needs to be conducted in order to confirm these claims. Additionally, it is important to note that all drugs – including those sold over the counter – can cause side effects, particularly when taken in large amounts over prolonged periods of time. Therefore, it is essential for ship owners to ensure all crew members are aware of the potential risks associated with using these products.

Some scientific studies suggest CBD can affect the liver if taken at higher doses, but there have been very few studies relevant to levels found in food. As a precaution, it is recommended that healthy adults do not take more than 70mg a day, unless a doctor has prescribed it. This is about 28 drops of 5% CBD. The evidence suggests adverse health effects could potentially be seen above this (Food Standards Agency, 2022).

The Centre for disease control (CDC, 2022) have urged consideration regarding the potential harms and side effects of CBD usage. These include:

- Liver damage
- Interference with other drugs you are taking, which may lead to injury or serious side effects
- Drowsiness or sleepiness
- Diarrhoea or changes in appetite
- Changes in mood, such as irritability

As mentioned previously, there is currently no specific legislation which regulates or restricts the use of CBD products by seafarers under UK law. Furthermore, due to their legal status remaining uncertain at present, this type of situation could easily lead to costly court cases if a dispute between a company and one of its employees arose due to suspicions about illegal substance use onboard a vessel.

In summary, whilst there may be some potential medical benefits associated with using certain types of over-the-counter CBD products amongst seafarers, there are still many unknowns when it comes to their safety and legality in the maritime industry today.

## Resources

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6. World health organization, WHO (2018). Cannabidiol (CBD) Critical review report. Available at: [https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/controlled-substances/whocbdreportmay2018-2.pdf?sfvrsn=f78db177\\_2](https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/controlled-substances/whocbdreportmay2018-2.pdf?sfvrsn=f78db177_2) (Accessed: 27/2/23)
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9. Food Standards Agency (2022). Cannabidiol (CBD) Consumer advice on Cannabidiol CBD extracts. Available at: <https://www.food.gov.uk/safety-hygiene/cannabidiol-cbd#:~:text=Advice%20for%20healthy%20adults,-Some%20scientific%20studies&text=As%20a%20precaution%2C%20we%20recommend,28%20drops%20of%205%25%20CBD> (Accessed: 27/2/23)
10. Centre for disease control and prevention, CDC (2022). Marijuana and public health. CBD: what you need to know. Available at: [https://www.cdc.gov/marijuana/featured-topics/CBD.html#:~:text=Cannabidiol%20\(CBD\)%20is%20a%20compound%20found%20in%20marijuana.&text=CBD%20can%20be%20derived%20from,mind%20altering%20substance%20in%20marijuana](https://www.cdc.gov/marijuana/featured-topics/CBD.html#:~:text=Cannabidiol%20(CBD)%20is%20a%20compound%20found%20in%20marijuana.&text=CBD%20can%20be%20derived%20from,mind%20altering%20substance%20in%20marijuana) (Accessed: 28/2/23)

Seafarers may not consider the use of CBD products as notifiable, or that a positive drugs test may occur due to their consumption. As such, it is vitally important for companies operating ships in UK waters – or anywhere else around the world – to exercise caution when allowing any form of psychoactive substance onto their vessels. It is prudent to remain cautious and ensure that all crewmembers always remain compliant with relevant laws during their voyage.

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This advice was compiled in collaboration with VL Oceans Marine, who specialise in providing comprehensive consultancy and surveying services throughout the United Kingdom, Ireland and Europe.

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## CREW HEALTH ADVICE

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The Club was the first to launch a crew health scheme in 1996 due to increasing crew illness claims and a lack of accountability of clinics. Since 1996, the Crew Health programme has become one of the Club's leading loss prevention initiatives. The aim of the programme is to reduce the volume and value of crew illness claims which are caused by a pre-existing illnesses or disease. These underlying conditions often impact on the crew member's fitness for service and can endanger not only the health of the seafarer but also the onboard safety of other crew.

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Sophia joined Thomas Miller in 1992 and from 1994 worked as a claims handler dealing mainly with French and Spanish Members. In 2004, Sophia became the Crew Health Programme Director. Sophia has undertaken a large number of clinic audits, implemented the standard medical

form and clinic guidelines. She has also lead the scheme through the largest period of growth and development with a doubling of approved clinic facilities and a four fold member increase. Sophia is a Director of Thomas Miller & Co. Ltd.

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Saidul Alom joined Crew Health from the European Region Service Team in 2004. Saidul provides administrative support to the Crew Health programme and is responsible for liaison with the approved clinics on financial billing matters and ensuring prompt payment of all clinic fees.

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Stuart joined Thomas Miller in 1998 as a claims trainee for UK P&I Club's Greek Members. In April 2005 Stuart joined Crew Health as the Team Administrator. Stuart is responsible for co-ordination of Member entries and administration for the clinic approval process.