CTPAT Alert – Illegal Narcotics in Refrigerated Containers

Last Updated: March 17, 2026

Background

As a voluntary supply chain security program based on trust, CTPAT is open to members of the trade community who demonstrate excellence in supply chain security practices and operate within the laws and regulations of the United States. CTPAT is issuing this alert to the maritime industry, specifically those involved in the export and import of refrigerated ocean containers departing from or being loaded in Central and South America, to highlight the ongoing security threat of illegal contraband and narcotics being introduced into these containers.

Maritime Security Threat Overview

CBP has observed an increase in attempts to introduce illegal contraband/narcotics, into refrigerated ocean containers at ports and loading facilities in Central and South America. In many cases, the contraband/narcotics seized also include tracking devices that criminal organizations use to track their illegal contraband. Criminal organizations exploit vulnerabilities in supply chain security, targeting containers during stuffing, transit, and at port facilities. These actions threaten the integrity of the supply chain and pose significant risks to CTPAT members and the broader trade community.

CTPAT Minimum Security Criteria and Remedies

CTPAT members must adhere to the minimum security criteria for maritime supply chains, including the mandatory 8-point container inspection at the point of stuffing. This inspection is critical to detecting and preventing the introduction of illegal contraband and narcotics.

Required 8-Point Container Inspection:

1. **Front Wall**
   Inspect for hidden compartments, structural damage, or signs of tampering.
2. **Left Side**
   Examine the entire left side for integrity, holes, or modifications.
3. **Right Side**
   Examine the entire right side for integrity, holes, or modifications.
4. **Floor**
   Inspect for false floors, concealed spaces, or signs of tampering.
5. **Ceiling/Roof**
   Check for false ceilings, roof modifications, or hidden compartments.
6. **Interior/Exterior Doors**
   Inspect locking mechanisms, hinges, seals, and door integrity for tampering or unauthorized access.
7. **Under/Carriage**
   Check the undercarriage for hidden compartments, structural alterations, or evidence of tampering.
8. **Refrigeration Unit/Exterior Access Panels**
   Inspect the refrigeration unit and exterior access panels to the unit for signs of tampering, hidden spaces, or unauthorized access.

Additional Recommendations:

- Conduct inspections in well-lit, secure areas with trained personnel.
- Document inspection results and retain records for audit purposes.
- Use high-security seals to secure the container doors, security tape/cables for the exterior access panels and record all seal numbers.
- Report any suspicious activity or evidence of tampering immediately to CBP or local authorities.

Reporting Suspected Violations
CTPAT members who identify evidence of illegal contraband or narcotics should report immediately to U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP):

- **CBP – Report Suspicious Activity by calling 1-800-BE-ALERT (232-5378)**
- **CTPAT – Report Suspicious Activity to the company's assigned SCSS**

CTPAT Program Compliance
CTPAT members found in violation of minimum security criteria or failing to conduct proper container inspections may be suspended or removed from the program.



SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico - U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) seized Tuesday 135 pounds (61.25 kilos) of cocaine concealed inside a refrigerated container.

CTPAT Program

CBP.GOV/CTPAT

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