

Standard Club reports “worrying trend” in update on West Africa piracy

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In a Standard Club update on piracy and armed robbery in West Africa the club said that it had noticed “a worrying trend” of an increase in acts of piracy and armed robbery in West Africa, in particular in the Gulf of Guinea.

For the first half of the year the International Maritime Bureau (IMB) reported 78 incidents of piracy and armed robbery against ships, down from 107 for the same period in 2018. However the Gulf of Guinea region accounted for 43% of the reported incidents, 73% of the reported global kidnappings and 92% of the reported global hostages taken.

The IMB now views the Gulf of Guinea as the highest risk area for seafarers and has urged shipowners and operators to “remain vigilant and report all suspicious activity to regional response centres and the IMB”.

Standard Club has issued a guidance to assist members when trading to areas in West Africa that may be at risk from piracy and armed robbery. It has drawn member’s attention to guidances published by the industry:

Best Management Practices to Deter Piracy and Enhance Maritime Security in the Red Sea, Gulf of Aden, Indian Ocean and Arabian Sea (BMP5)

The Club noted that, although BMP5 does not exclusively focus on piracy and armed robbery in West Africa, the risk assessment section contained within part 3, although not exhaustive, goes into detail as to what a risk assessment must consider.

Global Counter Piracy Guidance for Companies, Masters and Seafarers (GCPG)

The Club said that GCPG should be read in conjunction with BMP5. It contained guidance on piracy and armed robbery to be used by seafarers around the world.

Guidelines for Owners, Operators and Masters for protection against piracy and armed robbery in the Gulf of Guinea region (v3) ((GoG v3)

GoG v3 should be read in conjunction with GCPG and BMP5, the Club said. It provided specific information in relation to piracy and armed robbery in the Gulf of Guinea. Detailed information was provided on piracy tactics in the region, as well as guidance in case an attack takes place, or if attackers take control of the ship.

GoG v3 also provides a detailed explanation of Marine Domain Awareness for Trade – Gulf of Guinea (MDAT-GoG).

Marine Domain Awareness for Trade – Gulf of Guinea (MDAT-GoG)

MDAT-GoG was founded in 2016 and is a service operated by the French and UK navies. It provides a 24-hour manned service of military experts and aims to develop, maintain and share knowledge of security issues in the waters off Africa's western seaboard. MDAT-GoG administers a Voluntary Reporting Area (VRA) scheme under which merchant ships are encouraged to report position information while operating in the VRA. The VRA, as shown on Admiralty Chart Q6114, has been issued to clearly define an internationally recognized area, to encourage shipowners and operators trading off West Africa to join a trusted reporting scheme.

Standard Club "strongly recommended" the provision of Admiralty Chart Q6114 to all ships operating in this region.

The Club concluded that the risk of piracy remained high off West Africa and said that it encouraged members to exercise extreme caution when trading to areas that might be at risk from piracy and armed robbery.