



Secure seals could offer US an alternative to scanning.

28 July 2008

[Lloyd's List](#)

CONTAINER ports and deep sea boxlines should spare a thought for their air freight brethren, writes Roger Hailey.

Washington wants all US-bound maritime boxes to be scanned at foreign ports of departure by 2012. Expensive and complicated as that will be for the global maritime industry, it is but nothing when compared with the challenge faced by passenger airlines with revenue-earning cargo on board.

The US Government Accountability Office, in evidence presented to the House of Representatives earlier this month, cited “four major challenges” in developing a system to screen all cargo transported on a passenger aircraft by 2010.

For those involved in the debate over its maritime equivalent, the hurdles sound familiar: deployment of effective technologies, revision of screening exemptions, a lack of compliance inspection resources and securing inbound cargo.

Testimony from the US **Airforwarders Association** cited “cost-prohibitive” involvement in a voluntary scheme, with equipment costs that range from \$150,000 to \$500,000 per facility.

The forwarders continued their call, again familiar to the sea freight industry, for a “risk-based, multi-layered approach” to supply chain security.

“Engaging the supply chain, while utilising technology like tamper-proof seals to ensure the integrity of the cargo, is an excellent way to achieve full screening of cargo that does not place the entire financial burden on one entity or part of the supply chain”.

That said, there is, however, one vital aspect of passenger airline cargo scanning that is different to the maritime leg.

According to the GAO understanding of the law, “air carriers will ultimately be responsible for screening 100% of cargo transported on passenger aircraft should air cargo industry entities not volunteer to become a Certified Cargo Screening Facility”.

Of course, the above applies to US territory only, but shipping lines should breathe a sigh of relief that such a threat does not hang over their heads.

Importantly, though, the suggestion that non-scanning technology, such as seals, could be used as an acceptable alternative is to be welcomed.

If it can apply to passenger aircraft cargo, surely the most vulnerable of all transport, then it does not take a great legislative leap to allow similar alternatives for deep sea containers.

The technology is being developed, but do the lawmakers have the courage and vision to allow its introduction?