ABSTRACT

Cargo handling is an integral part of export and import transactions. It involves enormous money value products, either big or small in volume, for quick transfers. Cargo handling process abounds with checks and verifications but pilferage and theft occur pervasively and they spread their tentacles everywhere, both seen & unseen and sung & unsung.

Keywords: Air Cargo

INTRODUCTION

Pilferage is an act of petty theft and denotes volume. The word is described in Indian Railways Act. Theft is an act of stealing, robbery, larceny and it denotes volume and serious nature. Indian Penal Code defines theft “as whoever intending to take dishonestly any movable property out of the possession of any person without that person’s consent, moves that property in order to such taking, is said to commit theft “.

Though the terminology used is both mild and strong, the result of theft of cargoes in cargo handling produces a lot of vicious circles that affects Shippers, Manufactures, Freight Forwarders, Handling Agents, Airlines and Consignees. But still these perils do not get much attention and in majority of cases, they are covered up completely, though it results in loss of money and damage in business and reputation.

This problem of cargo theft and pilferage very much exists throughout the global supply chain and makes it a very difficult task .The below picture shows the increasing theft and pilferage globally. (Source: https://srmxkb.wikispaces.com/Theft+-+Cargo)
India is already on the elevated scale and becoming increasingly noted for large-scale theft, pilferage incidents and warehouse robberies. While these trends are continue to be of concern for Shippers.

**Background**

Theft and pilferage are of good shappen everywhere from the consigner to consignee. Normally, we can say that, it happens in the warehouse, during loading/unloading of truck, cargo ramp area, inside airport cargo warehouse and while palletization, Unit Load Device staging area, cargo release area, cargo towing area and even inside the aircraft while loading.

The theft ranges from cutting a hole in and taking out a few pieces that may be of General cargo, Valuable cargo, vulnerable cargo, Electronic; IT related goods and even Perishable cargo. In pilferage cases, it is not taken notice of and forgotten and in theft cases, though a lot of commotions and emotions are caused, the case are buried silently unseen, unsung.

For instance here are some of the incidents which have been brought to limelight “Millenium postdated 17.09.2014 goods worth crores stolen from airport cargo in two years” and “Times of India dated 16.05.2014 - Cargo theft put Kolkata Airport to Shame “

**Assessment**

An assessment was carried out based on the discussion with shipper on the effect of theft / pilferage on air cargo handling. Many shippers could only verbally express their feelings about this issue and could not provide written data due to their job limitations and confidentiality reasons. Here are some of their comments

1. Most of the shippers say that there are many unknown reasons for losses due to theft and pilferage and most of them have been untraceable
2. Many shippers are dissatisfied with the air freight terminal security
3. Some say that non-compliance of regulation results in poor security conditions in cargo terminals
4. A majority of the shippers use deceptive techniques to protect the high value goods from theft
5. All shippers agree that the rise in such incidents may only bring bad reputation for the Country and its Airports
6. Even though theft/pilferage rates are high and a threatening factor, they do not limit the growth of Air Cargo Industry.

**Consequences**

The material stolen is a loss to the owner of property, loss in compensation to the cargo handlers and loss to the final customer. The consigner repudiates the cargo handlers and the consignee repudiates the consigner. Addl D.G Airport said “ increase in theft of package is a cause of concern as it has security implications. It does not give only give a bad name to the Airlines, but to the Airport as well. It has a direct impact on the Overall Aviation security environment” (Indian Express Dated 24/05/2014)

According to a data available with CISF (Central Security Industrial Force) in 2011 - 55 cases, in 2012-55 cases, in 2013- 68 cases and in 2014 up to May 58 cases of package thefts have been reported. In the events Loaders, Airline staff or Ground Handling staff were involved in the criminal activities on the Airport Premises (Indian Express dated 25/05/2014).

**Why Thefts and Pilferages are unseen and unsung**

By analyzing the theft pattern and modus/operandi, we can presume that the theft ranges from circumstantial pilferage to organised crime. The organized theft is, it seems, committed and covered up with inputs from the inmates. The knowledge of consignment value, place, position etc is analyzed
and the scheme is executed. It appears that the ghost thieves’ presences are everywhere and in every corner but no one takes care to bust them, but with reasons, the reasons are felt but unspoken.

**Reasons**

While we are fondling with the ideas of do’s and don’ts, let us chart it out the probable reasons:

1. In some incidents, unauthorized substitutions of goods at last minute add up the mess and it is being done with the connivance of staff.
2. Infiltration of other staff to sensitive areas in one pretext or other happens frequently and in uncontrolled proportions. A Lackadaisical and lethargy attitude or wanton act of the staff propels this enigma.
3. Contract workers who have no training, no basic knowledge of cargo handling and security are prone to enticement.
4. Lack of training to regular employees on safety and security. Numerous programs are conducted by statutory bodies like, IATA, AAI, Handling Agent, Airlines etc. but they not used properly.
5. Goods are sometimes, artificially flooded at a single time and at a particular place so as to choke the process. This uncontrolled flow of goods leads to improper handling of goods and also leads to theft and pilferage.
6. Sample testing often leads to inaccuracy and opens the flood gates of corruptions, nepotism and free for all.
7. Paucity of staff in examination and inspection process, nullify the split of statuary obligation and compliance.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. High resolution and advanced CCTV should be installed at every vital point at cargo terminal.
2. Frisking of staff at every point of ingress and egress
3. Access Control and bio-metric system should be installed in the sensitive areas.
4. Covert tracking device should be embedded in Vulnerable, Valuable shipments.
5. More security personnel should be deployed with ample power and equipment’s
6. Airport policing authorities should have independent prosecution powers without depending on other Authorities.
7. Third party inspections and auditing should be conducted at regular intervals.
8. Independent Airport Intelligence Programme may be implemented

**CONCLUSION**

In this era of scientific invention advancements, the crime of pilferage and thefts in cargo handling should be encountered with advanced equipment, planning, execution and penalization. Awareness among the stake holders should be created so as to eradicate the loss and damage in reputation of Cargo Handlers, Airports and of the Country.

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