



Nuclear Free Local Authorities Steering Committee

# information

**NFLA Media release - for immediate release, 28<sup>th</sup> August 2013**

## **NFLA alarmed about docking of *Atlantic Cartier* in Liverpool less than four months after it was involved in a major fire involving radioactive materials**

The Nuclear Free Local Authorities (NFLA) is alarmed to discover that the 'roll-on roll-off' ship '*Atlantic Cartier*' is docking shortly in Liverpool, less than four months after it was involved in a major emergency fire incident in Hamburg Port at a time when it was transporting a significant amount of radioactive materials (1).

On May 1<sup>st</sup>, 2013 a fire broke out on the *Atlantic Cartier* whilst it was docked at Hamburg port. Three tugs, two fireboats and over 200 firefighters took several hours to fully control the fire and douse the flames to make it safe.

As well as containing a cargo of some 70 cars (30 of which were badly damaged), the *Atlantic Cartier* was also transporting 9 tons of uranium hexafluoride (UF<sub>6</sub>), a radioactive highly volatile and toxic compound most commonly used as an intermediate material in the production of nuclear fuel. The vessel also had 180 tons of flammable ethanol and 4 tons of explosives at the time the fire broke out. The nuclear fuel was being taken to the uranium-enriching facility in Lingen, Lower Saxony. Radioactive material shipments through Hamburg port are quite regular. If such radioactive materials catch fire they can be highly dangerous.

Fortunately, the firefighters were made aware of the nuclear fuel and removed the relevant containers quickly to a safe storage area, narrowly averting a significant radiation incident. It should be noted as well that whilst this emergency was taking place there was, quite close by, the opening outdoor service of the German Church Council at the Protestant Cathedral. This involved over 35,000 participants and the German President Joachim Gauck. The annual May Day parade was also taking place at which many thousands of people were participating in. (2)

On behalf of the NFLA, independent marine radioactivity pollution consultant Tim Deere-Jones has been researching the safety compliance of the *Atlantic Cartier*. He has uncovered an alarming history of safety deficiencies contained within the International Port State Control Inspection (PSCI) reports. (3).

Over the 5 year period 2008 to 2013 PSCI's have recorded 20 deficiencies through ten inspections of the *Atlantic Cartier*. These deficiencies relate to:

- International Safety Management (ISM),
- documentation of compliance with dangerous goods legislation,
- safety of access to working areas,
- Marpol (UN marine pollution convention) Annex 1 fire prevention issues,
- speed and distance indicators,
- safety of navigation (voyage plan),
- loadlines,
- propulsion auxiliary engine concerns,
- accident prevention (onboard personnel),
- ships certification and documentation,
- operational procedures (engines and equipment),
- distress signalling.

It should be noted that in no case did the recorded deficiencies result in any detentions and the

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*Atlantic Cartier* was deemed fit to sail, despite the deficiencies. There are standards below which vessels should not fall or they will be "blacklisted" or "black-flagged" in European waters. In Tim Deere-Jones view, such standards are sufficiently stringent for oil and chemical carriers, but appear to be less so for non-INF (irradiated nuclear fuel) carriers like the *Atlantic Cartier*. The standards are vessel-based but in Tim's view should plainly also be cargo-based.

One of the major issues of concern to the NFLA is that, though oil and chemical carriers are registered as oil carriers and built to specific, stringent, cargo-value standards, vessels carrying non-INF nuclear materials are not registered, or specifically designed and built as nuclear carriers. The *Atlantic Cartier* is registered only as a "Container Ro-Ro cargo Ship" despite the fact that the available evidence implies that the ship is a frequent and regular carrier of fissile material.

Between 2008 and 2013, the *Atlantic Cartier* was been found to have ISM (International Safety Management) deficiencies officially reported twice and MARPOL Annex 1 fire prevention deficiencies also officially reported twice (the last such report being dated 17/11/2012). It is also a matter of record that one of those ISM deficiencies was recorded by Liverpool Port authorities (01/09/2009) at the same time as a deficiency in speed and direction indicator was reported. Furthermore, it is also a matter of record that Liverpool Port Authorities have reported deficiencies in Safety of Navigation (voyage plan) and GMDSS equipment operation (15/12/2009) (*GMDSS stands for Global Maritime Distress and Safety System and is similar to the technology that the PNTL fleet – ships run by and for the UK nuclear industry- have*).

Given the use of Liverpool Port and the vessel's history of use as a uranium hexafluoride transporter it is a matter of real concern to the NFLA that the *Atlantic Cartier* may have been transporting fissile material through the Irish Sea and other UK and Irish waters at the time that those deficiencies were uncovered by the Liverpool Authorities.

The research by Tim Deere-Jones confirms that the *Atlantic Cartier's* voyage stage (which ended in the fire incident at Hamburg) began at Liverpool at the end of April. The ship was therefore either loaded with the fissile uranium hexafluoride in Liverpool, or was already carrying it when entering UK waters. The record shows the ship left Liverpool, passed north of Anglesey, southward through the Irish Sea, then through the English Channel and passed through the Straits of Dover on the 26/27 April 2013.

In the context of recent information that the *Atlantic Cartier* is approaching Liverpool Port again, further research undertaken by Tim Deere-Jones highlights that the Hamburg PSCI authorities inspected the vessel 2 days after the May 1<sup>st</sup> fire and recorded no less than 33 deficiencies in safety and operating standards including emergency fire pumps, fire detection equipment, fire fighting equipment, fire prevention, fire dampers, other fire fighting equipment, and the availability/accessibility of fire fighting equipment.

The May 3<sup>rd</sup> PSCI assessment also identified failures/deficiencies in a very wide range of other categories such as general safety, communications, magnetic compass operation, propulsion/auxiliary machinery, International Safety Management, and hull damage impairing seaworthiness. Despite this, the available evidence shows that the *Atlantic Cartier* was not detained in port until such time as the deficiencies/defaults/inspection failures were remedied, re-inspected and passed as compliant with all relevant standards. Thus, as has been the case in earlier years, it appears that the vessel was allowed to proceed despite the defaults and failures of safety compliance.

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In the NFLA's view, any reported vessel with any reported deficiency should not be allowed to carry fissile radioactive material of this type and volume and, as soon as such deficiencies are uncovered, it should be prevented from loading such cargo, or if already carrying such materials, it should be "arrested" or detained until such cargo is unloaded/transferred to a fully compliant vessel.

The NFLA is planning to contact UK ports to clarify where radioactive/fissile cargo (of such type and volume) is handled and what are their emergency arrangements in the event of such an incident.

NFLA Chair, Councillor Mark Hackett said:

"I am deeply alarmed and concerned that a vessel like the *Atlantic Cartier* is back operating in UK waters after such a serious incident in Hamburg involved nuclear materials. The research provided to the NFLA by Tim Deere-Jones suggests lower safety standards for such vessels compared to oil and chemical tankers, despite the dangerous cargo they have been transporting. The Hamburg incident could very well have led to a very serious environmental and safety emergency and it was only the quick thinking of port authorities and the emergency services that prevented such an incident taking place. To find out that, just four months after this incident, the vessel is unloading again at a UK port has to be a matter of concern."

Tim Deere-Jones added:

"For many years I have been concerned about the safety of vessels like the *Atlantic Cartier*, which carry radioactive materials. For vessels carrying such cargo I strongly advocate a more robust safety regime, as stringent as it is for oil and chemical tankers. The Hamburg incident was a "very near miss", which clearly demonstrates the possibility of such an incident occurring in a UK or Irish Port or in UK or Irish coastal waters. I don't want to see a more serious incident take place – this safety gap needs to be urgently plugged."

Ends

**Further information** - Sean Morris, NFLA Secretary - 0161 234 3244 or 07771 930196.

For full references to the research conducted by Tim Deere-Jones contact him on 01834 871011 or email [timdj@talktalk.net](mailto:timdj@talktalk.net).

## Notes to editors:

- (1) Merseyside CND Press Release, August 25<sup>th</sup> 2013, as quoted directly in Martyn Lowe's blog - <http://www.theproject.me.uk/?p=492>
- (2) Russia Today, 'Hamburg avoids 'radiation disaster' as ship loaded with fissile material, explosives, burns', May 18<sup>th</sup> <http://rt.com/news/hamburg-radioactive-ship-fire-464/> and Maritime News, May 20<sup>th</sup> <http://www.news.odin.tc/index.php?page=view/article/416/Fire-on-ro-ro-Atlantic-Cartier-could-spark-explosions-and-radioactive-contamination-Hamburg>
- (3) Research provided to the NFLA by Tim Deere-Jones, independent marine radioactive consultant, August 27<sup>th</sup> 2013. Contact Tim direct for specific references. A more detailed briefing will be shortly placed on the NFLA website.

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