

FOBAS Bulletin

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Possible Fuel Contamination in Houston and US Gulf Area

In the last month, FOBAS has dealt with a number of problematic VLSFO RM fuels from the US Gulf region, specifically from Houston and New Orleans. During the use of these fuels vessels have reported varying degrees of problems with the fuel injection equipment, which in a couple of cases has resulted in total loss of power.

The fuels in question have been bunkered from late March through to early May, with more recent fuels still under investigation.

All fuels have had routine ISO 8217 Table 2 testing carried out. Standard analysis shows these VLSFO's have relatively low viscosities from 61.9cSt down to 7.8cSt @ 50 Deg C. Acid number of these fuels ranged from 0.33mgKOH/g to 2.21mgKOH/g and the fuels in questions were supplied by different suppliers and barges.

Initial detailed testing by FTIR and GCMS methods of these fuels suggests the presence of various glycols, Tetrachloroethylene, unusually high levels of Tetrahydro DCPD (dicyclopentadiene) and Dihydro DCPD. Although the exact cause of problems is being established, based on the information to hand it is suspected that the presence of these aforementioned components at various concentration levels are likely to have contributed to the reported problems. Initial assessment also revealed that there are some blend components, at least 1-2% that are not a natural part of the usual refinery stream process and seems to be a possible combination of various chemical waste products.

In view of the above, we would suggest that any vessel bunkering in the US Gulf area, particularly around Houston and New Orleans, pay close attention to the fuel quality and ask for assurances from the supplier that the fuel meets not only the ISO 8217 Table 2 but also the general requirements of the standard (Clause 5) as well as stipulations of MARPOL Annex VI regulation 18.3. Attention should be given to the collection of bunker samples. It should be ensured that all parties have witnessed the sampling process and have signed witness forms accordingly, and that the supporting documentation includes records of all the samples considered representative of the fuel as loaded.

If you require any further information about this Bulletin, please contact us at fobas@lr.org or speak to one of our consultants on +44 (0)330 414 1000 (Southampton UK), +44 (0)1642 440991 Redcar (UK), +65 3163 0888 (Singapore), +30 211 990 7732 (Greece). For anything urgent, please contact us via our out of office number, +44 (0)1642 425660.