

Foreign crew stranded in US awaits fate of ship

John Gallagher, Senior
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Delphinus crew at anchorage off Port Everglades. Credit: Seafarers' House

Eleven foreign seafarers are hoping that the upcoming auction of a container ship will allow them to leave an anchorage off the coast of Florida after being stranded there since April.

Delphinus, the 600 teu, 6,850 dwt container ship owned by German KG company R.S.T. Schiffahrtsges, was arrested in April at Port Everglades, Florida, after alleged violations of its timecharter agreement.

AFCO Shipping, a Florida-based produce importer, claimed that the vessel owners breached their 18-month charter agreement after delays caused by engine failures during roundtrips between Port Everglades and Guatemala made AFCO liable for over USD770,000 in damages due to spoiled produce, according to court documents.

However, the shipowner was having severe financial issues without the means to settle claims made by AFCO and other parties and “basically walked away”, a lawyer representing Marlow Navigation, a claimant working on behalf of the vessel’s crew, told *IHS Fairplay*.

Those bidding on the 1997-built vessel did not meet the USD750,000 minimum bid at an auction held several weeks ago. The minimum bid at a second auction, to be held on 11 August, is set at USD100,000, according to the Marlow representative.

Meanwhile, the crew of Ukrainian, Filipino, and Polish nationals has been caught in the middle of the legal proceedings. Tending to the ship while anchored two miles offshore, they’ve been allowed to come to port just once a month for provisions and during bunkering.

“They’re doing okay emotionally, and physically they’re fine and getting all their needs met,” Ron Perkins, director at Seafarers’ House in Fort Lauderdale, told *IHS Fairplay*. “It’s just the typical stress and strain of being on a vessel with no shore leave.”

Several crew members have asked to come ashore if even for a few hours. They have been granted permission, but must remain at Seafarers’ House, which has paid for ship-to-shore visits through an emergency fund, the seafarers’ advocate noted.

Perkins, who has personally taken provisions out to the vessel several times since May, said it is only the second time he has dealt with a stranded crew since becoming the senior port chaplain at Seafarers’ House six years ago.

Perkins said the highest bidder for the vessel could repurpose the ship and put it back in service with a different crew, retain the same crew, or sell the vessel for scrap. “But crew wages will be first in line” when it comes to paying off claims, Perkins said.

Vessel arrests and subsequent fire sales, especially those of KG one-ship companies, have increased over the last eight years as the shipping financial crisis has put pressure on owners.

[It has been suggested](#) by Hamburg’s Ernst Russ Shipbroker, one of Germany’s largest brokerages, that consolidating such vessels into pools could improve chartering discipline and help reverse the trend.

Contact John Gallagher at john.gallagher@ihs.com and follow him on Twitter: [@JohnAGallagher1](https://twitter.com/JohnAGallagher1)

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