
UK sending ships to scrap yards in Bangladesh

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According to an Ecologist investigation, UK companies are among those using loopholes in European and international law to sell ships to Bangladesh scrap yards with little or no safety regulations.

The ship breaking industry is booming in Southern Bangladesh but NGOs say workers are frequently exposed to toxins and that at least one worker dies every week from explosions or falling steel plates.

UK based Andrew Weir Shipping Limited is one of a number of companies whose vessels have ended up on the beaches of Bangladesh in the past year. The company has sold four ships through a cash intermediary in China and at least one of them ended up in the notorious 'Lucky Shipyard' where children as young as 12 dismantle ships without safety equipment.

Two other UK companies, Zodiac Maritime Agencies and FGM Shipping Management Limited are both alleged by the French NGO Robin des Bois to have sold ships for scrapping in Bangladesh in the last year.

Under the Basel Convention, any ship containing hazardous substances cannot be sent for disposal in a developing country without extensive pre cleaning. However, these rules can be bypassed in two ways.

Firstly owners can wait till the ships are in international waters before declaring their intention to scrap the vessel, where the Convention does not apply.

Secondly, the ships can fly the flags of countries that are not party to the convention such as Antigua and Barbuda.

According to the NGO Platform on Ship Breaking, two thirds of the world's vessels are sailing under so called flags of convenience belonging to small states that compete by promising to keep taxes, fees and regulations light for ship owners.

There is no implication that workers have been killed or injured dismantling ships owned by UK companies. But when contacted, Andrew Weir Shipping Limited refused to confirm whether its ships had been cleaned of hazardous substances before arriving in Bangladesh.

Zodiac Maritime Agencies confirmed it had sent a ship to Bangladesh but could not provide proof that it had been cleaned of hazardous waste. FGM Shipping Management Limited did not comment on the allegations.

(Sourced from www.theecologist.org)

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