

Comunicación CLECAT - Fraude relacionado con el comercio de frutas

A continuación facilitamos la comunicación de la Directora General de CLECAT en la que informa sobre la reactivación de fraudes relacionados con importaciones de fruta.

Dear Member,

CLECAT is issuing a cautionary alert to European freight forwarders about a concerning resurgence in fraudulent activity within the fresh fruit trade and possibly also garments. Our British member, BIFA, have warned of recurring scams targeting freight forwarders, particularly involving the importation of fresh fruits like mangoes. These fraudulent schemes highlight the critical importance of conducting thorough due diligence to safeguard against financial losses.

The warning follows an incident last year involving a Preston-based importer with Belgian connections, who rapidly accumulated substantial debts with BIFA-affiliated forwarders and then vanished, leaving these businesses with unpaid bills. In that case, shipments of mangoes originating from Dubai and the Indian sub-continent were involved. Recently, BIFA members have encountered similar red flags with a Midlands-based company proposing fresh fruit imports, this time from Bangladesh.

The member freight forwarder that identified this recent threat shared notable similarities between this case and last year's scam, including:

- The fraudulent party only sought airfreight handling, without collection, customs clearance, or destination delivery services.
- Initial contact was unsolicited, with requests for quotations to various locations across Europe.
- Large cargo volumes were proposed, despite the company's limited financial capacity.
- There was an acceptance of quotes without any inquiries or negotiations
- The company address, listed as a Regus office, and the lack of prior import/export activity raised further concerns.
- Directors associated with the fraudulent activity have recently changed, with the new director reportedly of Belgian origin and listed as having no significant assets.

BIFA notes that the scam is easy to execute but difficult to trace once the fraudster has vanished. A fraud specialist confirmed that "short-firm frauds," or scams involving fleeting entities designed solely for fraudulent transactions, are prevalent in the freight forwarding sector. These schemes often target perishable goods, which move quickly and attract substantial upfront fees.

Practical Precautions for Freight Forwarders

To help protect European freight forwarders from falling victim to such schemes, CLECAT echoes BIFA's advice on implementing robust due diligence checks:

1. **Verify Business Credentials:** Insist on reviewing the most recent accounts of the trading entity, and check for any credit alerts or inconsistencies in asset and revenue capacity.
2. **Confirm Contact Legitimacy:** Be cautious with companies that approach without prior engagement, especially if they lack established records in the trade.

3. **Conduct Physical Verification:** Where possible, cross-check company addresses and facility locations to confirm the legitimacy of operations.
4. **Evaluate the Scope of Services:** Unusual requirements, like only requesting airfreight without customs or destination handling, should prompt further scrutiny.

best regards,



Secretaría.
Irun, 18 de noviembre de 2024