

Dangerous powder from lost cargo found on Dutch island (Update)

3 January 2019



Aerial photo provided by the Central Command for Maritime Emergencies Germany shows container vessel MSC ZOE near the German North Sea island of Borkum Wednesday, Jan. 2, 2019. The Dutch coast guard said that along with light bulbs, toys and flat screens, some of the containers carried closed-off barrels of an organic peroxide, a flammable and highly toxic compound. The container ship is suspected to have lost the cargo during an overnight storm in waters off the coastal border between Germany and the Netherlands. (Central Command for Maritime Emergencies Germany/dpa via AP)

A bag containing dangerous powder washed up on a small Dutch island on Thursday, a day after some 270 containers tumbled from one of the world's biggest cargo ships in rough weather, as authorities scramble to clean debris-strewn beaches.

Frisian Island authorities, which said the bag was found closed, identified the powder as "organic peroxide", a highly flammable substance used in making plastics.

"A bag containing 25 kilogrammes (55 pounds) of powder was found on the beach of Schiermonnikoog," Jan-Willem Zwart, spokesman for the security services in the region, told AFP.

The Panama-registered MSC Zoe, which was mostly carrying toys, furniture and auto parts, lost the containers late on Tuesday while battling a storm off the Frisian Islands, an archipelago off the northwestern Dutch coast also known as the Wadden Islands.

Coastguards said three containers that had been transporting organic peroxide on the MSC Zoe have not been located and are thought to have sunk.

So far, around 20 containers have been located near the shores of these islands while another six were found in German waters.

Following appeals from officials in the affected islands, the Dutch ministry of defence announced soldiers would arrive Friday to help the clean-up operation on coastlines strewn with rubbish, notably polystyrene.



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an overnight storm in waters off the coastal border between Germany and the Netherlands. (Central Command for Maritime Emergencies Germany/dpa via AP)

Volunteers have been helping collect items washed up on the beaches, which "look like a mess", Zwart said.

Authorities have warned volunteers and locals not to touch any bags but to call police or the fire brigade.

"We strongly advise residents and people who have come to clean the beaches to... immediately seek medical attention if they come into contact with the bags (containing organic peroxide)," Zwart said, warning that the chemical substance "can cause burns".

On the tiny island of Ameland "130,000 kg of debris has already been collected from eight km (5 miles) of beach", the authorities said in a tweet.

In a statement shipping firm MSC Mediterranean Shipping said it took the incident "very seriously, both in terms of the impact of such accidents on the natural environment and in terms of any damage to customers' cargo".

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The firm said it had appointed a salvage company to help retrieve cargo and the clean-up and had deployed ships equipped with sonar after what it described as a "substantial spill of containers".

Dutch broadcaster NOS on Wednesday broadcast footage of locals gathered around one of the containers, with toys and other materials strewn across the beach and one man carrying off a flat screen television.

The MSC Zoe, which berthed at the northern German port of Bremerhaven late Wednesday, is one of the world's largest container vessels at 396 metres (1300 feet) long and 59 metres wide. It was built in 2015.

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