Pirates Hijack Ship Carrying Antifreeze Chemical

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NAIROBI, Kenya (AP) — Pirates hijacked a ship carrying a poisonous chemical used in antifreeze early Monday off the northern tip of Somalia and took the 19 Chinese sailors onboard hostage, officials said.

The Singaporean-flagged Golden Blessing was seized inside the internationally recommended transit corridor in the Gulf of Aden that is patrolled by the anti-piracy naval coalition, said Lt. Col. Per Klingvall, a spokesman for the European Union's anti-piracy force.

All 19 crew are reported to be safe, he said. The ship was reported to be on its way from Saudi Arabia to India.

Klingvall said the 14,445-ton chemical tanker was carrying a cargo of glycol ethylene — which is used in antifreeze — when it was captured approximately 60 miles (95 kilometers) off the northern Somali coast. The vessel was moving toward the Somali coast after the hijacking.

Pirates rarely steal or damage the cargo of the ships they take, instead holding crews for multimillion-dollar ransoms. In 2008, pirates hijacked a Ukrainian cargo ship carrying 33 Soviet-designed tanks and crates of small arms but later released it after receiving a reported $3.2 million.

The ship hijacked Monday is owned by Golden Pacific International Holdings Ltd. and is chartered out to Shanghai Dingheng Shipping Co. Ltd.

In a statement, the Singapore Maritime and Port Authority said it "is working with relevant government agencies and the ship owner, and is monitoring the situation closely."

Somali pirates hold more than a dozen ships and several hundred crew members.

The Horn of African nation's 19 years of lawlessness has allowed piracy to flourish. The waters surrounding Somalia, including the Gulf of Aden, which connects the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean, are known to be among the world's most dangerous.

An international flotilla, including warships from the United States, the European Union, NATO, Japan and China, has been patrolling the area to protect a sea lane that links Asia to Europe.

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