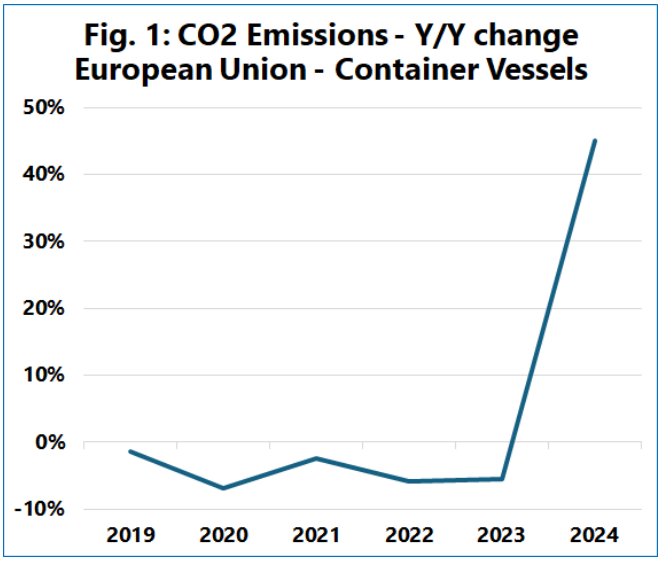
Houthis cause 18M tons of added emissions

In issue 723 of the Sea-Intelligence Sunday Spotlight, we analyse the dramatic reversal in years of progress in reducing the container shipping industry's carbon footprint.

The ongoing crisis in the Red Sea and the re-routing of vessels south of Africa, has led to a staggering 45% increase in CO2 emissions from container shipping in the European Union in 2024, according to mandatory EU emissions data under the EU Monitoring, Reporting, and Verification (MRV) regulations.



While the overall shipping sector saw a 10% rise in CO2 emissions, the impact on container shipping has been disproportionately severe.

Figure 1 illustrates the stark contrast between the consistent decline in CO2 emissions from 2018 to 2023 and the unprecedented spike in 2024. From 2018-2023, the container vessels had consistently been reducing their emissions, despite growth in container volumes, with emissions, on average, declining by -4.4% at an annual average.

If, purely hypothetically, we assumed there was never a Red Sea crisis and that the container lines would again in 2024 have reduced their total emissions by 4.4%, this would have led to total emissions of 34.7 million tons in 2024. Instead, the reported reality was emissions of 52.7 million tons. Assuming that the primary cause of the emissions increase in 2024 is due to the round-Africa routing, then the actions of the Houthis have caused an added level of CO2 emissions in 2024 related to container shipping of 18 million tons. This is essentially the same as the carbon emissions from the country of Cambodia.

The Red Sea crisis has, however, not really had a measurable impact on other shipping segments than container shipping, as no major increase is recorded in 2024 for these segments.

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