

Expert thinking on critical issues

SAFETY4SEA, in association with the North of England P&I Club, discusses topical industry issues.

Q: “The sulphur cap is less than a year away and with most vessels choosing compliant fuel, do you expect to see a spike in incidents and accidents related to the switch over?”



Alvin Forster

Deputy Director (Loss Prevention),
The North of England
P&I Club

Yes But perhaps not quite as bad as some are suggesting. Moving to compliant fuels will probably require extensive tank cleaning and we are all well aware of risks related to enclosed space entry. A significant concern surrounds the new VLSFO products which are likely to be blends or hybrids. We know little about the characteristics of these new compliant fuels other than the increased risk of incompatibility. Those opting for scrubbers aren't without risk. As more ports ban the use of open-loop scrubbers, these vessels may need to switch to and from compliant fuel on a regular basis as they enter and leave these restricted areas. We also expect to see an increase in time charter disputes where the charterer provides the vessel's bunkers.



Dr. Jan de Kat

Director,
ABS

Maybe The extent to which we see an increase in incidents will depend on how well fuel oil suppliers implement quality control and the ship-owners' ability to prepare their fleets for operating on low sulfur fuel oil (LSFO) well before 1 January 2020. It is important to begin proactively testing LSFO where it is available, carefully monitoring the performance of engines and systems as early as possible. Evaluating the performance of different types of LSFO will not only allow a better understanding of compatibility, stability, catalytic fines and tank heating requirements but also help identify any critical fuel quality issues in good time.



Panos Zachariadis

Technical Director,
Atlantic Bulk Carriers
Management

Yes I think so. Although fuels provided by majors and other reputable suppliers should be more safe, due to their procedures and internal testing, there are thousands of traders/suppliers out there. I'm afraid they will just be blending to the sulphur regulation limit. Unfortunately, the ISO specification -to be released- will not be sufficient in my opinion to address the potential problems, while the existing test analyses methods, available to owners, cannot catch the problems beforehand. Even extended Spectral analyses, may detect contaminants but not the potential problems as a result of the various blends. Detection of contaminants does not necessarily mean bad fuel, so the industry is currently plagued by false alarms.



Bill

Stamatopoulos

Business Development Manager South Europe,
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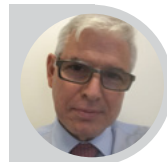
Yes, but initially Operational issues were experienced in the first SOx ECAs; however a similar trend was not observed in North Sea. Part of the reason is likely that the industry was better prepared; from supplier to buyer to ships' crew. Similarly: Fuel suppliers will undergo a learning curve in stabilizing their VLSFO production; Ship operators are thoroughly preparing; Ships' crew should be adequately trained for receiving widely different VLSFOs requiring different operational settings and procedures. Although a challenging task, the industry will adapt to the new environment via training, knowledge sharing and in cooperation with their fuel management partner.



Antonis Trakakis

Technical Director,
Arista Shipping

Yes there will be several incidents, although not all of them may become known. Potentially there are high chances that onboard separators will not cope well with the quality of the new compliant fuel, and even if it falls within spec, the fuel at engine inlet may not be favorable to her fuel system. The problems may vary a lot both in nature and frequency between the 2-stroke and 4-stroke engines, and between various operating loads, while trading needs that might dictate commingling of fuel will deteriorate the situation onboard. It is to be proven whether running on a blended 0.5% fuel is more favorable to owner than running on LSMGO.



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Yes there will be a spike in incidents and accidents. It will be similar to the problems faced when LSMGO was first used, but it will be more dramatic. Up to now we still don't know the products that we will be using. The compliant fuel stability will be an issue. The compatibility will also be an issue, with one of the major suppliers advising that the compliant fuels, coming from their own refineries around the world, will be compatible but not mixable. Blending of fuels will increase cat fines. Few suppliers will test their products and obtain no objection letters from engine makers. Engines will run continuously with the compliant fuel and not all tanks will be properly cleaned.



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