

Report on Arctic Conference held at Dalhousie University

BY TOM PETERS

Training ships' officers to safely navigate conditions in Canada's Arctic waters is the main priority of The Nautical Institute, says Capt. David (Duke) Snider. Snider, CEO of MarTech Polar Consultants Ltd., Victoria, B.C. and Chair of the Institute's ice navigation project, said, "If you don't have properly trained and properly experienced navigators and bridge operators on ships, the ships just aren't going to get from A to B. We have seen that gap manifested in lost time and injury in accidents on ships directly attributable to a lack of knowledge and skills in ice navigation. So, for us that is something we are willing to commit our resources to, to ensure there is some standard coming out within the next couple of years."

Snider was one of several speakers at a day-long seminar addressing the evolving Arctic and the challenges and opportunities it presents. The seminar, at Halifax's Dalhousie University, was hosted by Maritime Division of The Company of Master Mariners of Canada. It touched on such issues as global warming and a declining ice cap, the potential for the development and recovery of large oil and gas reserves, increased mining in northern regions, lack

of port infrastructure, Canada's search and rescue capabilities, legal responsibilities and liabilities of companies working in the Arctic, icebreaker design and technology, operating ships in the Arctic winter, the Shipping Federation of Canada's Arctic views, and the potential of navigating northern cargo sea routes between Europe and Asia and more.

Over a dozen speakers and delegates expressed concern about the operation of ships in ice-infested waters, the potential environmental impact of commercial development, the ability of nation states surrounding the Arctic to respond to possible oil and gas accidents, search and rescue efforts, and the necessity to work with community groups in the Arctic.

Snider, with the British Columbia branch of London-based Nautical Institute, which has 48 branches around the world, said there needs to be a program to certify seafarers with skill, knowledge and competency in ice navigation because it is getting more difficult to find people with ice experience. However, since his group started its ice-navigation project, the International Maritime Organization (IMO) has come out with a plan to develop its own Polar Code to

ensure qualified people are handling vessels in ice conditions.

The IMO has put a deadline for its program to be in place and Snider sees that as an issue. "Part of the problem is the Secretary General (IMO) had a great idea and it was totally altruistic. He said we need a mandatory Polar Code because we have been playing with guidelines for far too long that people just aren't following. So let's make sure this thing will have teeth and put a deadline on it," said Snider. But he said there are fairly detailed topics within the Polar Code concept that the IMO "has been having difficulty wrestling to the ground and it can be a difference between a flag state's perception of wanting its ships to be able to travel anywhere, and a coastal state that wants its coastal regions protected and there is a divide. When you have a working group Chair whose direction is produce something by the end of a defined period of time, it tends to gloss over things or leave things behind, and that's what has been happening in particular in the HTW (IMO subcommittee) working groups," he said. And, he said, the biggest part of that, around the training certification, was boiled down to a very simplified table that does not address all the



Left to Right, Capt. Jack Gallagher, Dr. Ron Pelot, Dr. Brian Fleming, Order of Canada, and Capt. Patrick Gates.

Photo: Patrick Gates

ARCTIC shipping



DAVID SNIDER



ALDO CHIRCOP



WYLIE SPICER

concerns of international shipping. "That's where we, The Nautical Institute, are concerned that it is not addressing that gap."

In other issues, Dr. Aldo Chircop of Dalhousie, an expert on Russia's interest in the Arctic, said Russia has the longest coast line in the central Arctic Ocean and the country's policy is aimed at strengthening its position in the Arctic. He said Russia's strategy is to increase its undersea land ownership through an application to the UN Law of the Sea Convention, establish a coast guard, develop mineral resources and build port infrastructure.

Dan Oldford, a senior engineer with ABS Technology, who works in the harsh environment technology centre in St. John's, discussed the effects of cold temperatures on ships and equipment. His discussion also focused on ice loads and pressure on hulls and offshore structures and the research being done to develop systems to deal with these conditions.

Calgary-based marine lawyer Wylie Spicer with Norton Rose Fulbright Canada and legal advisor on seabed development, discussed the impact the Macondo oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico has had on how undersea development is viewed in the Arctic. There are increasing concerns about liability issues, and the how drilling in the ocean is seen partly as a maritime issue. He said the regulatory path required by the National Energy Board and Environmental Impact Review Board that oil and exploration companies will have to follow, is very detailed and when they assess the risk, there will have to be a closer look at flagged vessels, classification rules for operation, and shore-based issues for response to a spill in the Arctic, etc. He said Imperial (Exxon), Chevron and ConocoPhillips all have an interest in Arctic exploration.

Marc Ouellette, Maritime coordinator for the Joint Rescue Coordinate Centre, Halifax, brought to light the difficulties of

search and rescue in the Arctic. He said the centre is responsible for 15.5 million square kilometres, 40 per cent of which is north of the 60th parallel north. He said infrastructure in the Arctic to aid search and rescue is practically non-existent. Primary assets for searches are fixed wing aircraft and helicopters from bases in Gander, NL; Greenwood, NS; Trenton, ON; Winnipeg, MB; and Comox, BC.

Ouellette said response time to Alert, for example, the furthest point north likely for an operation, is eight hours flying time for fixed-wing from their bases and 23 hours for helicopters. These distances and times alone bring in challenges with crew changes and potential weather issues. He outlined a case from a number of years ago that dealt with the rescue of four hunters in the Far North caught on an ice flow. The mission, which took longer than anticipated, included both fixed-wing aircraft and helicopters, and encountered technical problems, crew change issues, communication problems and infrastructure problems and poor weather.

The seminar was the fourth in a series hosted by Master Mariners of Canada. Capt. Jack Gallagher, spokesman for Master Mariners, said seminar participants found the seminar to be very useful because of the "many practitioners" in attendance. "Research and development are vital to developing sustainable transportation options and infrastructure in the Arctic," Gallagher said. "Much work is underway in Canada but it takes significant effort to find out what is going on and to track the progress. The research covers all aspects from social and economic to very technical research on the impact of Arctic temperatures on shipboard equipment. It is beneficial to occasionally get progress reports to maintain awareness and to determine entry points for those who wish to contribute or follow more closely," he said.



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