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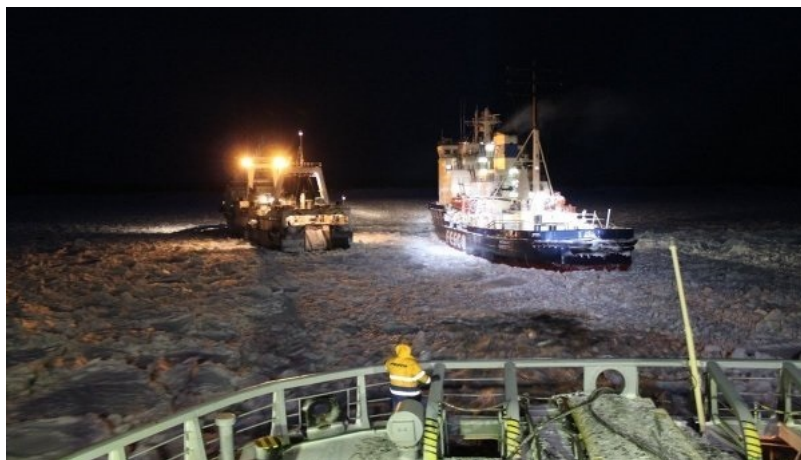
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Polar Code Definitions are Cause for Concern



BY WENDY LAURSEN
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The Polar Code currently defines three classes of ship with respect to the degree of winterization that will be required for entering polar regions, and for Captain David "Duke" Snider, they are a cause for concern.

Snider has over 30 years' experience as an ice navigator and Canadian coast guard commanding officer. In 1995 he was part of the team that wrote the then draft position paper on ice navigation standards for what was hoped to be the first Polar Code, and he is a member of The Nautical Institute NGO delegation at IMO for the development of the current version.

Although the classes A, B, and C (A being the most ice strengthened and C including no or light ice strengthening) are consistent with the International Association of Classification Society (IACS) Unified Requirements for Polar Class, they are vague, says Snider. "Part of the vagueness comes from the choice of definitions that are used to describe ice. Depending on which IMO instrument you refer to, they use the words ice free and open water differently. We tried to get that straightened out in the Polar Code working group but so far this remains unresolved. So now you have a Polar Code which must be enabled by MARPOL which has different requirements and definitions, SOLAS that has different requirements and definitions and STCW that is a little bit different again.

"If we look at the types, A, B and C compared to IACS harmonized polar classes, it makes it much more likely that a ship could get some sort of approval to operate in polar waters without really meeting the grade."

It is important to understand that polar ice is different to that experienced in the Baltic, the Caspian, the Great Lakes and Sakhalin, says Snider. "The two things that make ice particularly dangerous in polar regions, north and south, are multi-year ice, which is incredibly hard, harder than experienced elsewhere, and glacial ice. These types of ice can rip a ship open. It's like thinking of porridge when you are going through Baltic ice and concrete when it's multi-year or glacial ice in polar waters."

This is when search and rescue (SAR) capability comes into the risk picture. "You are at the end of a logistics rope if anything goes wrong in the polar regions. People talk about the Arctic Council and SAR agreements, but little has been done to increase infrastructure other than in Russia," says Snider. "The US, Canada, Norway and Iceland have not improved their SAR capability. They keep talking about it, and annually the US Coast Guard spends some money relocating assets around the Alaskan Arctic, but it is just shifting focus not extra capability."

North of Edmonton in Canada, air support is nearly 24 hours away, and Canadian ice breakers can be

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24-48 hours away, he says. Additionally, only 20 percent of the Arctic is charted to modern standards. These areas represent the usually travelled marine corridors, but any vessel venturing outside these corridors does so at their own risk. Russia is building ice-breaking SAR ships but they are not ready yet, and much of their land-based SAR developments are suited to operations very close to shore.

In the most recent draft of the Polar Code, the provision for engaging experienced ice navigators to advise the bridge team when in polar ice conditions was completely dropped. Snider says this leaves masters and vessels that may not normally operate in polar waters but who may be faced with only occasional or a spot charter voyage unable to obtain clearance to proceed as none on board have sufficient experience. "The Nautical Institute supports Canada's position that ice navigators should be acceptable, providing they are currently certified as watchkeeping officers and have the required knowledge and experience to advise and support a lesser experienced bridge team."

There's still time to change the Polar Code as it will continue to be worked on at MEPC 67 in October this year. "We've got a little while. We can try and get the Polar Code more refined, but right now it's a little frightening," says Snider.

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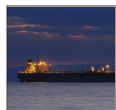
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