

REDUCTION OF SERVICES BY THE CANADIAN COAST GUARD

I would like to draw your attention to the looming reduction in services by the Canadian Coast Guard.

The Canadian Coast Guard in Ottawa has announced that in an effort to save money, it will be reducing the number of Marine Communications and Traffic Services Officers on watch at each of the five centres located in the Pacific Region. Your readers will be familiar with the services we provide from Vancouver, Victoria (Sidney), Tofino (Ucluelet), Prince Rupert and Comox as Coast Guard Radio and Traffic Services (see "Vessel Traffic Services" May 2011).

There are no job cuts as a result of this decision. The Canadian Auto Workers members that work at these centres are committed to providing the same professional services they always have, but feel that by thinning out the service, the government and coast guard are placing lives and the environment at risk.

Having just gone through a lengthy fight against lighthouse de-staffing, the government is now trying to reduce the very service (MCTS) that collects the weather information and disseminates it to the mariners that use it.

Reducing from three officers on watch to two will mean the flow of communications to search and rescue resources and the Joint Rescue Coordination Centre will be delayed. At busy times during marine incidents, there may be times where vessel traffic services will be unmonitored.

Although the Canadian Coast Guard in Ottawa has said it has assumed the risk and implications of this decision, the CAW feels the public is not willing to sacrifice their own safety for the few dollars saved based on decisions made 2,500 miles away on their behalf.

Allan Hughes,

Regional director, CAW Local 2182

OPEN LETTER TO BC FERRIES ON AIS USAGE

On an international basis there has been a major effort to increase vessel traffic

With appropriately implemented, estimates of approach can be used and speed to avoid risks well in advance, a vessel is not transmitting length and beam, it is possible for a skipper to adequately assess the surrounding situation and respond with an appropriate response.

Is there a particular reason for the BC Ferries' vessels not to transmit identifier information (MMSI number)? Some do, many do not!

As a vessel operator, I am concerned when large commercial vessels do not enter the appropriate AIS database for the vessel including their name and destination (or routes). Although this data is required under Section 10 of the Navigation Safety Regulations, Transport Canada, it can often be difficult to determine the appropriate response to an approaching AIS signal.

It seems to me that the lack of AIS information is a security concern in many countries maintain their own MMSI database (in Canada, the MMSI number is always transmitted, providing information necessary to identify a vessel for nefarious purposes). A decision to not transmit AIS information, including the vessel name, for any purpose and may compromise the safety of vessel operators in emergency situations.

Although speed and course are critical it is always possible to contact a vessel using the MMSI number if there is some concern. The vessel name and routing information often makes it unnecessary to use direct VHF communication which could be distracting to the watch officer.

AIS is a valuable addition to the repertoire of navigational aids and a sure boater I find it useful. It is a shame that a major commercial enterprise does not have a consistent AIS database.

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Len Burton,
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