

Coast Guard Emphasizes New Fuel Sulfur Limits

MARCH 5, 2015

On January 1, 2015, the new ultra low sulfur fuel limit went into effect in the North American Emission Control Area (ECA). On March 3, 2015, the U.S. Coast Guard reminded vessel owners and operators of the safety issues associated with changeovers from higher content sulfur fuels to ultra low sulfur fuel oils within U.S. waters.

The ultra low sulfur fuel limit went into effect in accordance with Annex VI to the International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships (MARPOL). In all four ECAs worldwide – including the North American and U.S. Caribbean ECAs – the maximum fuel sulfur fuel oil limit was reduced from 1.00% to 0.10% effective January 1, 2015. The U.S. Coast Guard and the Environmental Protection Agency have been emphasizing enforcement efforts on vessel owners and operators since January 1 and the penalties for burning non-compliant fuel in the U.S. ECA are significant.

The recent Coast Guard safety alert notes that there have been several reported incidents involving machinery space fuel leakages while vessels were switching fuel to ensure compliance. Fortunately, to date, such leakages have been contained, but they could have resulted in serious engine room fires or other dangerous incidents.

The Coast Guard emphasized that the fuel changeover process must occur outside of the ECA (generally 200 nautical miles from the coast) and that particular care should be taken with fuel operating temperatures. The Coast Guard also noted that there is ample industry guidance available regarding safe fuel oil changeover operating procedures.

To view the Coast Guard's March 3, 2015, Marine Safety Alert, [click here](#).

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