

ENVIRONMENTAL GROUPS APPALLED AT LACK OF ACTION ON AIR POLLUTION FROM INTERNATIONAL SHIPPING

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Clean Air Task Force—North Sea Foundation—Bellona Foundation—
Friends of the Earth US

Environmental groups allied with Friends of the Earth International expressed alarm this week at the lack of action by the international community to reduce harmful air pollution from ships. Two years ago, the International Maritime Organization agreed to review and create new international standards for air pollution for international shipping. These revisions were to be completed by this July 2007.

However, delegates at the IMO meeting in London all this week were unable to agree on substantive decisions to reduce air pollution from shipping, despite the near universal agreement that such reductions are sorely needed. Instead, the IMO is considering a new schedule that will not produce a final decision on any new limits until 2008 at the earliest—in fact, even further delay is possible.

Most ocean-going ships are powered by huge diesel engines that spew forth thousands of tons of air pollution each year across the globe. These toxic gases and particles cause substantial damage to human health (cancer, heart attacks and other cardiopulmonary problems up to and including premature death) and the environment (including acid rain and coastal eutrophication). Damage is especially heavy in large areas near the coasts in the Northern Hemisphere.

Air pollution from land-based sources has already been reduced substantially in many countries, leaving shipping as the last major unregulated source of air pollution on the planet. And, spurred on by globalization and large recent increases in global trade, shipping emissions are rising rapidly—and presently expected to double by 2030 or so. In fact, by 2020, shipping emissions are projected to exceed land-based emissions in Europe and parts of the United States.

“Air pollution from ships is a large and growing human health and environmental threat of global proportions,” stated David Marshall of the Clean Air Task Force. “It is irresponsible for governments to allow this pollution threat to continue when there is ample technology today capable of reducing this toxic pollution substantially.”

Eelco Leemans of the North Sea Foundation added, “the IMO must pick up the pace and act soon. If IMO cannot—or will not—take prompt action to reduce shipping emissions, then Europe, the US and other countries that care about the health of their citizens and environment will need to move ahead with their own requirements.”

A delegation of international, European and US organizations, formally represented by Friends of the Earth International, are urging IMO to require ships to reduce emissions by 80% or more. This can be accomplished by the use of cleaner marine fuels and the application of available air pollution controls on both new and existing ships. Groups attending this week’s IMO meetings were the Clean Air Task Force, the North Sea Foundation and the Bellona Foundation.

While many countries and progressive elements of the shipping industry are also supporting prompt IMO action to reduce shipping pollution, the oil industry, much of the shipping industry and “flags of convenience” countries are dragging their feet, using every opportunity to slow down or block any real progress.

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