

Commission presents EU strategy for safer ship dismantling

The European Commission today presented an EU strategy to make the dismantling of old ships safer for workers and the environment. Every year between 200 and 600 large merchant ships are taken apart for their valuable scrap metal. Many ships taken out of service in Europe end up being dismantled on beaches in South Asia. A lack of environmental protection and safety measures results in high accident rates, health risks and extensive pollution of wide stretches of the coast. The proposed strategy on better ship dismantling includes actions to help implement key elements of an international Convention on safe ship recycling, due to be concluded in May 2009. It also proposes measures to encourage voluntary action by the shipping industry and better enforcement of current EU waste shipment law.

European Environment Commissioner Stavros Dimas said: "While there have been improvements in industry practices in recent years, the problem of ship dismantling remains acute. Workers in South Asia are being exploited and their lives put at risk working in deplorable conditions, while coastal areas are being polluted and ecosystems threatened. The best way to resolve the ship dismantling crisis is to work together at EU and international level. As we look forward to a globally binding convention next year, the EU is already working to support the new rules. The strategy presented today should ensure that ships with strong links to the EU are only ever dismantled in safe and environmentally sound facilities."

The issue of ship dismantling

The number of dismantling sites in the European Union has fallen over the last 20 years and there is no longer sufficient capacity to process the large merchant fleets operating under EU flags or owned by companies in the EU.

Today ship dismantling takes place largely in South Asia – mainly in India, Bangladesh and Pakistan. The industry provides thousands of jobs, but health and safety conditions are poor. Older ships contain many hazardous materials, including asbestos, polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) and large quantities of oil.

The problem of ship dismantling is expected to get worse: the dismantling of single-hull oil tankers is predicted to peak in the next few years as they are phased out in favour of safer double-hulled vessels. Around 800 such tankers are expected to be taken out of service.

The Commission initiated work to develop an EU-wide strategy on ship dismantling in April 2006. In 2007 it presented a Green Paper [\[1\]](#) setting out a range of possible measures and this was followed by a public consultation process. More recently, the European Parliament adopted a resolution calling on the Commission and Member States to take urgent action on ship dismantling.

International rules

The International Maritime Organisation (IMO) is preparing an international convention on safe ship recycling, which will be globally binding. The Convention aims to provide a comprehensive system of control and enforcement "from cradle to grave" and relies in particular on the survey and certification of ships and the authorisation of ship recycling facilities. Although final negotiations are due to be completed in May 2009, the IMO Convention is not expected to enter into force before 2015.

Main elements of the proposed EU strategy

The EU strategy proposes a number of measures to improve ship dismantling conditions as soon as possible, including in the interim period before the entry into force of the IMO Convention. These include:

- starting preparations for establishing measures on key elements of the convention, such as those on surveys, certification and inventory of hazardous materials on board, as soon as possible after its adoption;
- encouraging voluntary industry action through measures such as awards for exemplary green recycling; publication of guidance, such as a list of 'clean' ship dismantling facilities;
- technical assistance and support to developing countries for safety training programmes and basic infrastructure for environmental and health protection;
- better enforcement of current waste shipment rules such as more checks at European ports; more cooperation and information exchange between EU authorities; and establishing a list of ships that are ready for scrapping


The strategy also proposes that the Commission look at the feasibility of the following:

- developing a certification and audit scheme for ship recycling facilities worldwide and evaluating how EU ships can be encouraged to use such a scheme;
- making warships and other government vessels not covered by the Convention, subject to EU rules for clean dismantling;
- establishing a mandatory international funding system for clean ship dismantling

Developing an EU strategy for environmentally sound ship dismantling is one element of the Commission Action Plan for an integrated maritime policy for the European Union.

For further details visit:

<http://ec.europa.eu/environment/waste/ships/index.htm>

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