

BLG Sub-Committee (BLG 12) agrees technical proposals for reduction of air pollution from ships

Draft amendments to revise the MARPOL regulations on the prevention of air pollution from ships were agreed by the IMO Sub-Committee on Bulk Liquids and Gases (BLG) when it met for its 12th session in the week 4-8 February.

The Sub-Committee agreed a draft revised Annex VI to the MARPOL Convention and amendments to the NO_x Technical Code. These will now be submitted to the Marine Environment Protection Committee (MEPC), which meets for its 57th session from 31 March to 4 April 2008.

A number of options remain open for discussion at the MEPC, which is expected to approve the amendments prior to their formal adoption at MEPC 58 (6 to 10 October 2008). The amendments would then enter into force, under the tacit acceptance procedure, 16 months later, in March 2010, or on a date to be decided by the MEPC.

SO_x and PM emissions from ships

Given the significant environmental, human health, and economic consequences of a decision on how best to further reduce emissions of sulphur oxide (SO_x) and particulate matter (PM) from ships, the Sub-Committee felt it appropriate that relevant policy decisions should be taken at the Committee level and that its principal duty was to "set the table" for such discussions.

The BLG Sub-Committee agreed to reduce the six options to just three, representing an equitable and fair compression of the different concepts and proposals under consideration by the Organization, as described below (the figures in square brackets remain open for further consideration by the MEPC):

Option 1 Global

1.00% (10,000 ppm)* fuel standard applied globally in [2012]
0.50% (5,000 ppm) fuel standard applied globally in [2015]

Option 2 Global / Regional

Global cap remains unchanged at 4.50% (45,000 ppm)
Emission Control Areas require 0.10% (1,000 ppm) standard in [2012]

Option 3 Global / Regional with Micro-Areas

Global cap is lowered to 3.00% (30,000 ppm) in [2012]
Emission Control Area standard lowered to 1.00% (10,000 ppm) in [2010]
Emission Control Area standard lowered to 0.50% (5,000 ppm) in [2015]

Micro-Emission Control Areas may be established at a distance of no more than 24 nautical miles from the baseline with a 0.10% (1,000 ppm) standard. A proposal for such Micro-Emission Control Areas must be submitted to the IMO for review, but are to be subject to a relaxed set of criteria.

These three options have now been put forward by the Sub-Committee to the MEPC. It was noted that the respective implementation dates, control levels, and concepts outlined in the above options would all be subject to debate and modification and that nothing precluded the development of a hybrid proposal.

Particular attention was drawn to the need to maintain the production link between marine fuel and land-based fuel with respect to specifications around the world and to adopt a phased approach such that refinery and supply configurations could be adapted, in response to market signals, to ensure continued availability and supply without major disruption.

NO_x regulations for new engines

The Sub-Committee further developed the three-tier structure for new engines, which would set progressively tighter nitrogen oxide (NO_x) emission standards for new engines depending on the date of their installation. Tier I represents the 17 g/kW standard stipulated in the existing Annex VI.

For Tier II, it was agreed to recommend a standard that would see NO_x emission levels for new

engines installed from 1 January 2011 reduced by a figure of between 15.5 per cent and 21.8 per cent, depending on the engine's operating parameters.

With regard to Tier III, a number of delegations expressed the view that a geographically based approach requiring significant reductions in designated Emission Control Areas (ECAs), should be introduced. The recommended Tier III standard, applicable to new builds beginning on 1 January 2016, will, therefore, see a reduction of 80 per cent from Tier I levels in specific emission control areas designated through IMO.