Coast Guard Polar Icebreaker Departs Seattle; Bound for Antarctica



The Coast Guard Cutter Polar Star and crew departs Seattle to begin Operation Deep Freeze, Nov. 16, 2022. *U.S. COAST GUARD / Petty Officer 3rd Class Michael Clark*

SEATTLE – The Coast Guard Cutter Polar Star (WAGB 10) and crew departed Seattle Nov. 16 and is in transit to Antarctica in support of Operation Deep Freeze, the Coast Guard Pacific Area said in a Nov. 17 release.

Operation Deep Freeze is an annual joint military mission to resupply the United States Antarctic stations in support of the National Science Foundation, the lead agency for the United States Antarctic Program. This marks the 26th year for the Polar Star to render support.

Each year, the Polar Star crew breaks a navigable channel

through ice, sometimes as much as 21-feet thick, to allow fuel and supply ships to reach McMurdo Station, which is the largest Antarctic station and the logistics hub of the U.S. Antarctic Program.

“This is a unique and important mission that the Coast Guard undertakes each year,” said Capt. Keith Ropella, commanding officer of the Polar Star. “It takes a special crew to make the 20,000 nautical mile round trip through some of the most remote locations and arduous conditions on the planet to get the job done, and perhaps more significantly, to prepare this 46-year-old cutter for the challenge. I am overwhelmed and immensely proud of the tireless work this crew and our shore side support partners have done since returning from the last Operation Deep Freeze back in April to get us ready to go, and I am incredibly excited to make this once in a lifetime journey with them.”

The U.S. Coast Guard is recapitalizing its polar icebreaker fleet to ensure continued access to the Polar regions, project U.S. sovereignty and protect the country’s economic, environmental and national security interests.

“As the Nation’s most active and visible maritime presence in the high latitudes, the Coast Guard maintains a vital leadership role in Antarctica and deeply values its relationship as a trusted partner to the National Science Foundation and U.S. Antarctic Program,” said Vice Adm. Andrew J. Tiongson, commander Coast Guard Pacific Area. “Polar Star’s continued support of Operation Deep Freeze exemplifies the Coast Guard’s unique blend of operational capability, regulatory authority and strategic leadership in the polar regions. It is an honor to ensure uninhibited access to the region, and join together with our international allies and Department of Defense sister services to support essential scientific research and the preservation of a safe, secure and cooperative environment on the Antarctic continent.”

Through Operation Deep Freeze, the U.S. Coast Guard provides direct logistical support to the National Science Foundation and maintains a regional presence that preserves Antarctica as a scientific refuge.