Polar Star Completes Antarctic Treaty Inspections, Resupply Mission



The Cutter Polar Star moored on Feb. 5 next to a Maersk containership in McMurdo, Antarctica. U.S. Coast Guard/Senior Chief Petty Officer NyxoLyno Cangemi

MCMURDO STATION, Antarctica – The 159 crew members onboard U.S. Coast Guard Cutter Polar Star departed McMurdo Station on Feb. 19 after escorting three refuel and resupply vessels and assisting with a five-day inspection of foreign research stations, installations and equipment in Antarctica, according to the Coast Guard Pacific Area.

The departure marks the Polar Star's 23rd journey to Antarctica in support of Operation Deep Freeze, an annual joint military service mission to resupply U.S. stations in Antarctica, in support of the National Science Foundation, the lead agency for the U.S. Antarctic Program.

The Seattle-based 399-foot, 13,000-ton Polar Star created a 23-mile channel through the ice to McMurdo Sound, which enabled the offload of over 19.5 million pounds of dry cargo and 7.6 million gallons of fuel from three logistics vessels. Together these three ships delivered enough fuel and critical supplies to sustain NSF operations throughout the year until Polar Star returns next year.



Royal Canadian Navy Leading Seaman Jeff Dubinsky prepares for a dive. Scuba divers from the U.S. Coast Guard, U.S. Army and the Royal Canadian Navy serve aboard the Polar Star to effect emergency repairs if needed to the aging heavy icebreaker. U.S. Coast Guard/Senior Chief Petty Officer NyxoLyno Cangemi

The Polar Star also supported a team of U.S. government

officials from the State Department, National Science Foundation, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and Coast Guard who conducted a five-day inspection of foreign research stations, installations and equipment.

The U.S. continues to promote Antarctica's status as a continent reserved for peace and science in accordance with the provisions of the Antarctic Treaty of 1959. The inspection serves to verify compliance with the Antarctic Treaty and its environmental protocol, including provisions prohibiting military measures and mining as well as provisions promoting safe station operation and sound environmental practices.

The team inspected three stations: Mario Zucchelli (Italy), Jang Bogo (South Korea) and Inexpressible Island (China). This was the 15th inspection of foreign research stations by the U.S. in Antarctica and the first since 2012. The U.S. will present its report on the inspections at the next Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting in Helsinki, Finland, in May.

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>
> *Greg Stanclik, commanding officer of the Polar Star*

"I am immensely proud of all the hard work and dedication the men and women of the Polar Star demonstrate each and every day," said Greg Stanclik, commanding officer of the heavy icebreaker.

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Commissioned in 1976, the Polar Star is the only operational U.S. heavy icebreaker, capable of breaking ice up to 21 feet thick. Reserved for Operation Deep Freeze each year, the ship spends the winter breaking ice near Antarctica, and when the mission is complete, returns to dry dock to conduct critical maintenance and repairs in preparation for the next Operation Deep Freeze mission.

If a catastrophic event, such as getting stuck in the ice, were to happen to the Coast Guard Cutter Healy in the Arctic or to the Polar Star near Antarctica, the U.S. Coast Guard is left without a self-rescue capability. By contrast, Russia operates more than 50 icebreakers – several of which are nuclear-powered.

The U.S. Coast Guard has been the sole provider of the nation's polar icebreaking capability since 1965 and is seeking to increase its icebreaking fleet with six new polar security cutters to ensure continued national presence and access to the polar regions.

In April, the Coast Guard awarded VT Halter Marine Inc. of Pascagoula, Mississippi, a contract for the design and construction of the Coast Guard's lead polar security cutter, which will also be homeported in Seattle. The contract also includes options for the construction of two additional PSCs.

"Replacing the Coast Guard's icebreaker fleet is paramount," said Vice Adm. Linda Fagan, commander of the Coast Guard's Pacific Area. "Our ability to clear a channel and allow for the resupply of the United States' Antarctic stations is essential for continued national presence and influence on the continent."