

## Drones detect possible sulphur violations on 10% of ships near Gibraltar

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Spanish authorities, in conjunction with the European Maritime Safety Agency (EMSA), have been deploying drones over the Strait of Gibraltar to monitor the level of sulphur oxides being released by ships sailing in what is one of the world's busiest shipping lanes.

EMSA said that the programme, which was an expansion of similar efforts previously conducted in Northern Europe's special designated emission control areas, had discovered that nearly 10% of the ships transiting the Strait of Gibraltar merited further inspection for possible breaches of the current sulphur regulations. EMSA's remotely piloted aircraft (RPAS) has been carrying out two flights and an average of 10 inspections per day in an operation under the direction of the Spanish Ministry of Transport, Mobility and Urban Agenda.

Carried out by the Spanish General Directorate of Merchant Marine the programme began flights in mid-July from a base in Tarifa and will continue until the end of October.

EMSA said that current figures indicated that 294 vessels transiting the strait were monitored and, of these, 27 were found to be in possible breach of the 0.5% limits of sulphur content in their fuel. The measurements and records were automatically encoded in the information exchange system which triggers an alert in the EMSA THETIS-EU database.

EMSA noted that this did not directly confirm non-compliance but said that it helped port authorities target ships for inspection and proceed with the lab-testing necessary for confirmation of the fuel composition.

The project was set up by the Spanish Ministry of Transport, Mobility and Urban Agenda (MITMA) in collaboration with the Algeciras Maritime Captaincy and the General Directorate of Merchant Marine.

The aircraft used is a CAMCOPTER S100 and it is under contract to EMSA from the consortium of Nordic Unmanned, Norce, and UMS Skeldar.

The Spanish programme is the first time the monitoring has been conducted beyond the Northern European emission control zones. Danish and French authorities worked with EMSA in the past on similar test programmes to monitor emissions.

EMSA offers Remotely Piloted Aircraft System services at no charge to all EU member states, with the cost being borne from central funds.

EMSA plans further expansion of its RPAS program in 2022.