

Drones to monitor ship emissions in Baltic for sulphur content

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An emissions monitoring campaign that will use remote-controlled drones is launching this month in the Baltic, with the specific aim of looking for ships failing to comply with the sulphur content restrictions in the region.

The project is being conducted by the European Maritime Safety Agency (EMSA) with the Federal Maritime and Hydrographic Agency.

For three months a specially equipped drone will measure the sulphur content in the exhaust plumes of ships transiting the Baltic Sea. The drone will be able to detect if applicable limits have been breached. Image data will also be collected for hydrographic surveying purposes.

The remotely piloted aircraft will take off from the German Armed Forces' Staberhuk site on the east coast of Fehmarn and fly over selected ships operating in the Fehmarn Belt and the Kadetrinne/Kadetrenden.

Regulations mean that sulphur levels cannot exceed a level of 0.10% in the Baltic Sea Emission Control Area (SECA).

The measurement results are made available in real-time to the authorities in European ports via the Port State Control information system operated by EMSA. Ships can be specifically selected for inspection at their next port of call, and samples of the fuel can be taken.

EMSA has offered the Remotely Piloted Aircraft System (RPAS) service free of charge to EU countries. Danish and French authorities operated similar emission monitoring programs with EMSA in 2020 and last year the agency implemented a monitoring program in the Baltic at the request of the Environmental Protection Department of Lithuania's Ministry of the Environment.

Spanish authorities in 2021 conjunction with EMSA deployed drones over the shipping lanes at the Strait of Gibraltar. This identified that nearly 10% of the ships

transiting the Strait of Gibraltar merited further inspection for possible breaches of sulphur regulations.

The drone flights are operated by the Norwegian company Nordic Unmanned on behalf of EMSA. The sensor technology and analysis capabilities for the emission measurements is supplied by the Danish company Explicit ApS.