

Canadian study calls for ban and phasing out of scrubbers



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It has not been a good year for scrubbers. First, and despite evidence provided to the contrary by industry groups, an increasing number of countries and ports introduced rules against open-loop systems. Then the Covid-19 pandemic devastated the price of oil, reducing the price differential between VLSFO and the old HSFO. That brought to a virtual halt any economic reason to continue with a conversion, which comes with a high fixed cost.



And now a study commissioned by the Canadian Government has recommended that individual governments, including Canada, take unilateral action to restrict or prohibit scrubber discharges from both open-loop and closed-loop systems.

The report from the International Council on Clean Transportation (ICCT) asserts that scrubber-fitted ships, particularly cruise ships, were "cheating the global fuel standard".

ICCT asserted that scrubbers were harmful both to the air and to the sea.

It said that, even though scrubber discharges usually complied with IMO guidelines; that compliance does not guarantee that scrubber discharges are safe.

The main thrust of the ICCT argument is that, although scrubbers lower sulphur dioxide emissions, but other emissions were higher, specifically those of carbon dioxide, particulate matter, and black carbon, when compared to low-sulphur fuels like MGO.

For water pollutants, the study found that all scrubbers (open-loop, closed-loop, and hybrid) discharged water that was more acidic and turbid than the surrounding water. The report also said that scrubbers emitted nitrates, PAHs and heavy metals.

The report recommended that the Canadian government immediately prohibit the use of scrubbers, because they were not equivalently effective at reducing air pollution as ECA-compliant fuels. It also called for an immediate prohibition on all scrubber discharges in Canadian ports, internal waters, and territorial seas.

The report said that "we also recommend that the IMO focus on harmonizing rules for scrubber discharges including where, when, and even if those discharges should be allowed, and to do so with urgency. The IMO should consider prohibiting the use of scrubbers as a compliance option for new build ships and work to phase out scrubbers installed on existing ships."

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