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Protecting Blue Whales and Blue Skies

Results from 2014 ship speed reduction trial in Santa Barbara Channel

SANTA BARBARA, Calif. – A coalition of government and non-profit groups today announced results from a 2014 vessel speed reduction trial incentive program in the Santa Barbara Channel to slow cargo ships down to reduce air pollution and increase protection of endangered whales.



A whale appears close to a container ship. (Photo: John Calambokidis/Cascadia Research)

From July through November 2014, seven global shipping companies – COSCO, Hapag-Lloyd, K-Line, Maersk, Matson, Mitsui O.S.K. Lines and United Arab Shipping Company – slowed speeds of ships for 27 trips through the channel to 12 knots (from previous speeds of 14-18 knots) for an incentive payment of \$2,500 per trip. Slowing ships to 12 knots or less cuts air pollution, and also greatly reduces the chance that a ship strike on a whale will be fatal.

The trial achieved a reduction of 16 tons of nitrogen oxide emissions over the 27 trips, and a reduction of 500 metric tons of greenhouse gas emissions. Both represent a 50 percent reduction from baseline emissions. Nitrogen oxide contributes to the formation of ground-level ozone, a primary component of smog that is harmful to human health. Most of the ship transits occurred from July through October, a time period that coincides with the peak period of ozone air pollution and the peak whale feeding season in the Santa Barbara Channel.

“It is exciting that even a small-scale trial can produce positive results for air quality,” said Dave Van Mullem, director of the Santa Barbara County Air Pollution Control District. “We look forward to building on this achievement.”

“The success of the vessel speed reduction trial is evident in the strong partnership and the shipping industry’s willingness to participate to advance our respective goals of endangered whale conservation, cleaner air and maintaining maritime commerce,” said Chris Mobley, superintendent of Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuary.

The trial program, developed and implemented by the Santa Barbara County Air Pollution Control District, NOAA’s Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuary, and the Environmental Defense Center, was modeled after successful speed reduction incentive programs at the Ports of Long Beach and Los Angeles. The trial established a continuous slow-speed zone from the Ports through the Channel.

U.S. Rep. Alan Lowenthal said: “We in Long Beach, and the whole Los Angeles Basin, have been the beneficiaries of cleaner air from the Ports’ successful Green Flag speed reduction program for years, and I am thrilled to see the carrier participation in the Santa Barbara Channel. The trial which has an exceptional three-for-one pay-off for slowing vessels in the channel – reduced local air pollutants, reduced greenhouse gas pollutants, and reduced whale fatalities.”

Maersk Line representative Dr. Lee Kindberg, director, Environment & Sustainability, North America, noted, “This Santa Barbara Channel trial is the only ship speed reduction incentive program that I know of in the world that is not associated with a port. It’s a unique effort and partnership. We are pleased that we could participate.”

Pacific Merchant Shipping Association (PMSA) vice president TL Garrett said, “PMSA and our members are committed to seeking science based solutions for reducing both vessel air emissions and the risk of vessels striking whales. This voluntary pilot program is an excellent opportunity for the maritime industry to work cooperatively with key partners on a process to evaluate the potential benefits of this strategy to address both issues. We look forward to working with all the partners to use these preliminary results to further refine and expand our ongoing efforts to reduce air emissions while enhancing the protection of whales.”

The speed reduction trial was funded by the Santa Barbara Foundation, the Santa Barbara County Air Pollution Control District, and the Ventura County Air Pollution Control District, with payments administered by the National Marine Sanctuary Foundation.

“We are pleased to be part of this innovative effort to reduce air pollution off our coast and protect public health,” said Mike Villegas, air pollution control officer for the Ventura County Air Pollution Control District.

“Moving forward we are looking to build on the trial’s success, aiming to establish a full-scale program in the Santa Barbara Channel and up the coast. California greenhouse gas cap and trade auction funding and other air quality funding are being explored as potential revenue sources,” said Kristi Birney, the Environmental Defense Center’s marine conservation analyst.

The success of the trial has drawn the interest of elected leaders.

“The results from the trial are very exciting and show that we can protect human health and the environment while also supporting and sustaining a healthy local economy,” said U.S. Rep. Lois Capps. “Improving air quality and reducing the danger posed by ships to whales around the Channel Islands are both important to the Central Coast. I applaud the efforts by the coalition of agencies and NGOs in this trial, and look forward to working with them to build on this success.”

“This trial provides solid evidence that the vessel speed reduction program is working to reduce emissions and improve our air quality while protecting marine life,” said state Senator Hannah-Beth Jackson (D-Santa Barbara). “It is a clear signal that we must continue to build upon this innovative and commonsense program for our coast.”

NOAA’s Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuary was designated in 1980 to protect marine resources surrounding San Miguel, Santa Rosa, Santa Cruz, Anacapa and Santa Barbara islands. The sanctuary spans approximately 1,470 square miles, extending from island shorelines to six miles offshore, and encompasses a rich diversity of marine life, habitats and historical and cultural resources.

The **Santa Barbara County Air Pollution Control District** is a local government agency that works to protect the people and the environment of Santa Barbara County from the effects of air pollution. Learn more at www.OurAir.org
(<https://sanctuaries.noaa.gov/exit.html?url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.ourair.org%2F>).

The **Environmental Defense Center**, a non-profit law firm, protects and enhances the local environment through education, advocacy, and legal action and works primarily within Santa Barbara, Ventura, and San Luis Obispo counties. Since 1977, EDC has empowered community based organizations to advance environmental protection. Program areas include protecting coast and ocean resources, open spaces and wildlife, and human and

environmental health. Learn more about EDC at www.EnvironmentalDefenseCenter.org (<https://sanctuaries.noaa.gov/exit.html?url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.environmentaldefensecenter.org%2F>).

The **National Marine Sanctuary Foundation** enhances national marine sanctuaries in their goal to protect essential U.S. marine areas and to ensure a healthy ocean. Through public-private partnerships, NMSF fosters scientific research, funds conservation projects, supports educational programs, and advocates for public policies on behalf of these special places representing the best hope for the ocean and Great Lakes. Learn more at www.NMSFocean.org (<https://sanctuaries.noaa.gov/exit.html?url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.nmsfocean.org%2F>).



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More Information:

[Protecting Blue Whales and Blue Skies Factsheet \(blue-whales-blue-skies-prochure.pdf\)](#)
[Santa Barbara County Air Pollution Control District \(<https://sanctuaries.noaa.gov/exit.html?url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.ourair.org>\)](#)

[Ship Strikes Overview \(http://channelislands.noaa.gov/management/resource/ship_strikes.html\)](http://channelislands.noaa.gov/management/resource/ship_strikes.html)

[Great Whales: Searching for Safe Passage \(https://sanctuaries.noaa.gov/exit.html?url=http%3A%2F%2Fenvironmentaldefensecenter.org%2Flearn%2Fcurrent_cases%2Fsave_the_whales%2Findex.html\)](https://sanctuaries.noaa.gov/exit.html?url=http%3A%2F%2Fenvironmentaldefensecenter.org%2Flearn%2Fcurrent_cases%2Fsave_the_whales%2Findex.html)

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