

Winter at Sea

By Captain John O'Sullivan

Winter is the hardest season to be working at sea especially in European waters. This is mainly due to the adverse weather. It is a period of wind, rain and cold conditions, often with frequent storms. In these conditions extra care must be taken to avoid accidents. As some of you may know I am the Captain of an Oil Tanker (see the Autumn 2014 issue of *Nature's Web*) and thus have full responsibility for the safety of the ship and the crew who sail on her. I also need to ensure the crew have full confidence in my decisions with regard to sailing in adverse weather. It is a busy time for us because due to the cold weather there is an increase in the consumption and demand for heating oil, petrol and diesel, which we deliver to many cities around Europe.

Preparation for each voyage requires all loose equipment be secured against movement due to rolling and pitching of the ship. Even inside the accommodation, the galley, mess room, cabins, engine room and bridge have to be checked for moveable objects. The first winter storm usually shows us where these

objects are because after a good summer we sometimes forget how rough it can be. Blu-tac is one of the best inventions for use on a ship in the winter. Fatigue is another thing we have to monitor carefully in winter as it's hard to get enough sleep when the ship is rolling heavily and so there is an increased potential for an accident to happen. Looking at past records, we appear to have fewer accidents in winter possibly because there is greater awareness and more care is taken.

Sea conditions can vary greatly in winter as some days can be flat calm where we can see whales swimming in the distance and other days the seas are so high that dolphins can be seen directly out the bridge window swimming alongside us on a 30 foot wave. In the Baltic Sea we can encounter ice where huge icebreaking tugs are used to maintain open shipping lanes between ports.

Once February is upon us we can then start to look forward to calmer conditions for the summer to come.

Weather Forecasts

In winter, we monitor the weather forecasts with greater intensity than in the summer months so that we can plan a voyage around the possibility of storms and heavy seas. This may mean we have to take a diverted route or possibly seek a sheltered anchorage at times to avoid the worst of these conditions. On occasion we may be caught out in bad weather as a predicted weather pattern can suddenly change.



Rough seas



Frozen waters



A White Christmas

Photographs courtesy of Capt. John O'Sullivan



Christmas at Sea

Although it is hard to be away from loved ones and family over the Christmas we try to make it somewhat pleasant on board. We put up a Christmas tree and decorations and a little crib. Even the

figures in the Crib are held in place with Blu-tac! Sometimes the Missions to Seafarers supply small gifts to the crew, which are put under the tree. We also try to plan a special Christmas dinner with turkey and all the trimmings. I want to take this opportunity to wish you a very Happy Christmas!