

Global shipping companies recognized for reducing speeds to protect blue whales and blue skies

MSC, Swire Shipping get top "Whale Tail" award for slowing off California coast in multi-agency Vessel Speed Reduction Program

CALIFORNIA, USA, September 27, 2022

[/EINPresswire.com/](https://www.einpresswire.com/) -- Shipping companies received awards for reducing speeds in the 2021 "Protecting Blue Whales & Blue Skies" program. Eighteen shipping companies participated, transiting at 10 knots or less in the San Francisco Bay Area and the Southern California region. The program's Southern California region extends from Point Arguello (in Santa Barbara County) to waters near Dana Point (by the Ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach).



MSC and Swire Shipping won the top "Whale Tail" Award from Protecting Blue Whales and Blue Skies

The voluntary incentive program ran May 15, 2021 through November 15, 2021.

“

At MSC, we refuse to be complacent, and recognize that we must all do our part to protect marine life.”

Stanley Kwiaton, MSC General Manager of Port Operations - West Coast

Shipping companies receive awards based on the percent of distance traveled by their vessels through the Vessel Speed Reduction (VSR) zones at 10 knots or less and with an average speed of 12 knots or less. The 10-knot target complements the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) and U.S. Coast Guard's requests for all vessels (300 gross tons or larger) to reduce speeds during the months of peak endangered blue, humpback, and fin whale abundance to protect these whales from

ship strikes.

Ship strikes are a major threat to whales globally and to the recovery of endangered blue, fin,

and humpback whales in California waters. Reducing the risk of ship strikes is a major priority of NOAA's, including NOAA's West Coast [national marine sanctuaries](#). Observed and documented deaths totaled 51 endangered whales from 2007-2021, and likely represent only a small fraction of the total number of ship strikes taking place annually.

The timing of the program also coincides with the season when ground-level ozone (smog) concentrations are typically high. The 10-knot target allows ships to travel at an efficient operating load using less fuel and producing less pollution. Ocean-going vessels transiting the California coast generate nitrogen oxides (NO_x, a precursor to smog), sulfur oxides (SO_x), particle pollution, and greenhouse gasses (GHGs). These vessels account for nearly 200 tons of NO_x per day emitted off the coast of California, which affects ozone levels onshore in many regions of the state. The areas of greater Los Angeles (including Ventura County), Santa Barbara County, and the San Francisco Bay do not meet the state and/or federal air quality standards for ozone.

Three award tiers recognize participating companies based on the percent of distance their fleet traveled through the VSR zones at speeds of 10 knots or less. The three award tiers are Sapphire (85-100% of fleet total distance in VSR zones traveled at 10 knots or less), Gold (60-84%), and Blue Sky (35-59%). Automatic Identification System (AIS) transponders on each ship transmit the ship's speed and location; AIS data was analyzed for each fleet and the company's performance was classified by tier. Companies that performed at the Gold or Sapphire level were awarded a financial incentive.

For the fourth year in a row, Mediterranean Shipping Company (MSC) notably achieved the Sapphire tier in the large fleet category and demonstrated that planning enables ships to reduce speeds in VSR zones without disrupting operations. In 2021, MSC traveled more than 23,000 nautical miles at 10 knots or less. Swire Shipping achieved the Sapphire tier in the small fleet



Slower ships reduce the risk of fatal whale strikes.
Credit: John Calambokidis



Ocean air is essential to everyone. Photo: Bay Area Air Quality Management District

category with 1,500 nautical miles at 10 knots or less. For their outstanding commitment, these two companies earned the [Protecting Blue Whales and Blue Skies](#) Whale Tail award.

The VSR incentive program has expanded in scope and environmental benefits each year, including 2021, which marked the seventh year. Highlights of the 2021 program include:

Of the nearly 280,000 nautical miles of ocean transited by all the ships in the program, nearly 180,000 nautical miles were at 10 knots or less, which is equivalent to traversing the circumference of the Earth more than eight times.

Ships in the program transiting the southern California approximately 200-nautical-mile VSR zone traveled at 10 knots or less for 66% of the total miles traveled. This number has steadily increased season after season, (in 2017, approximately 21% of the miles were traveled at 10 knots or less). This shows the increasing commitment by the participating companies over the years.

In the 50-nautical-mile San Francisco Bay Area VSR zone, cooperation levels from the participating companies remained fairly consistent compared to previous years with a combined value of 60%.

Shipping companies that participated in the 2021 program reduced their air pollutant emissions by 650 tons of NOx and 22,201 metric tons of regional GHGs. (For example, this equates to the GHG emissions from 4,784 passenger vehicles driven for one year, or the amount of GHGs produced by charging more than 2.7 billion smartphones.) These numbers represent approximately a 25% reduction in NOx pollution from the ships that participated in the program, as compared to baseline conditions.

The transits of vessels participating in the VSR program posed approximately 50% less strike mortality risk to whales than if those vessels did not slow in cooperation with the program.

Ships in the Sapphire, Gold, and Blue Sky award tiers had sound levels that were 5 dB per transit lower when compared to baseline source levels. With a reduction in noise pollution whales can likely communicate easier.

Seven companies – MSC, COSCO Shipping Lines, Maersk, Ocean Network Express (ONE), Wallenius Wilhelmsen, Yang Ming, and Swire Shipping – generously declined their financial incentive payment. Those funds will be reinvested in the program.

The program has also implemented a [Brand Ambassador](#) Initiative, for brands interested in reducing the impact of their global supply chain. Shippers receive data on the reduced speed efforts of their shipping companies and the resulting decrease in air pollutants, greenhouse gasses, ship strikes and ocean noise. This information can then be used to inform consumers purchasing their products and help these brands make more sustainable shipping choices.

“Protecting Blue Whales and Blue Skies” program is a collaborative effort by Santa Barbara County Air Pollution Control District; Ventura County Air Pollution Control District; Bay Area Air Quality Management District; Channel Islands, Cordell Bank, and Greater Farallones national marine sanctuaries; The Volgenau Foundation; California Marine Sanctuary Foundation; National Marine Sanctuary Foundation; Greater Farallones Association; Environmental Defense Center; Point Blue Conservation Science; Starcrest Consulting; and Scripps Whale Acoustic Laboratory/Scripps Institution of Oceanography.

Sarah Marquis

National Marine Sanctuary Foundation

+1 949-222-2212

[email us here](#)

Visit us on social media:

[LinkedIn](#)

This press release can be viewed online at: <https://www.einpresswire.com/article/593091074>

EIN Presswire's priority is source transparency. We do not allow opaque clients, and our editors try to be careful about weeding out false and misleading content. As a user, if you see something we have missed, please do bring it to our attention. Your help is welcome. EIN Presswire, Everyone's Internet News Presswire™, tries to define some of the boundaries that are reasonable in today's world. Please see our Editorial Guidelines for more information.

© 1995-2022 Newsmatics Inc. All Right Reserved.