

10 Years of “Whale-Safer” Transits off California

Industry Participation Yields Big Impact for Endangered Whales, Air Quality & Underwater Noise

CA, UNITED STATES, March 11, 2025 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Research results show that the 10th annual season of Protecting Blue Whales and Blue Skies Program (BWBS) in 2024 reduced the risk of deadly ship strikes to whales by 50%, underwater noise by 38%, smog-forming pollution by 1,400 tons and greenhouse gases by nearly 50,000 metric tons along the California coast.



Environmental Impact

Cumulative Program Impact (2014-2024 Seasons)

- 5,900+ tons NOx emissions avoided
- 200,000+ metric tons of regional ghg emissions avoided
- 1,596,008 nautical miles at 10 knots or less

Latest 2024 Season Analysis

- Source levels of participating vessels reduced by 38%, or 4.1 decibels
- Fatal ship strike risk to endangered whales reduced by 50%+

Protecting Blue Whales and Blue Skies Environmental Benefits Results

Each year, BWBS works to incentivize [the world's largest shipping companies to opt in to “whale-safer” speeds](#) (10 knots or less) off California to help reduce fatal strike risk to whales as well as

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Jess Morten

air and underwater noise pollution. After each Vessel Speed Reduction (VSR) Season (May to December) ends, BWBS analyzes vessel AIS data to determine enrolled fleets’ cooperation levels, recognizes the shipping lines whose fleets most consistently adhered to reduced speed requests, and analyzes how these voluntary efforts translate to quantifiable environmental benefits for the marine environment and coastal California communities.

2024 Season results and methodologies related to determining the corresponding reduced risk of fatal

strikes, ocean noise, air pollution and emissions from these whale-safer transits [can be found here](#). Below are some high level summaries of the impact and context behind these program impact areas:

Ship Strike Risk Reduction:

2024 Results: Research partners with Point Blue Conservation Science compared in-season transit speeds of participating transits to out-of-season speeds and quantified the reduction in fatal strike risk associated with that change. The analyses show that transits of participating vessels posed a 50.1% lower strike mortality risk to whales.



Context: Globally, the top two leading causes of mortality to whales are collisions with large vessels - known as ship strikes - and entanglements. One of the main goals of the program is to decrease the risk of fatal ship strikes from large vessels. Lower speeds both reduce the risk of serious injuries to whales and allow whales more time to avoid impact. Moreover, this benefit scales with the number of participating vessels and the total distance traveled at safer speeds. As the number of participating vessels grows, the absolute benefit to whales increases accordingly.

Underwater Noise Pollution:

2024 Results: Research partners from Scripps Institution of Oceanography analyzed acoustic data and found that, across all program zones, the source levels of participating vessels was reduced by 38%, or 4.1 decibels, when the 2024 program was active versus inactive.

Context: Whales have evolved over the millennia to use sound for their daily life functions — to navigate, communicate, and keep in contact during long migrations. Noise pollution disrupts these essential behaviors, threatening their ability to thrive. Implementing VSR programs in regions with high whale presence is a crucial step in mitigating the harmful effects of chronic noise pollution and protecting these vulnerable species.

Air Quality & Greenhouse Gas Emissions:

2024 Results: Research partners compared in-season transit speeds of participating transits to historic, out-of-season speeds and quantified the reduction in emissions associated with that change. Analyses show the program resulted in estimated reductions of 1,405 tons of oxides of nitrogen (NOx), which is the equivalent of taking 900,000 cars off the road for a year. It also resulted in estimated reductions of 33 tons of oxides of sulfur (SOx), 8.4 tons of diesel particulate matter, and 49,945 metric tons of regional greenhouse gases.

Context: When most fossil-fuel burning ships reduce speeds to the “whale-safer” threshold, it also decreases air pollution and emissions by about 27% from baseline. NOx, a key contributor

to ozone, is of particular concern for many communities, especially those overburdened by ports, high traffic, and industrial infrastructure. Ocean-going vessels contribute a large portion of the smog-forming NOx emissions affecting coastal California communities.

Strong Industry Participation Driving Cumulative Impact

For the 2024 Season, BWBS verified that 743 vessels, across 49 shipping lines, opted in for 425,981 nautical miles of whale-safer and improved air quality behavior. Twenty-three of those lines qualified for the coveted “Sapphire” award by achieving 85% or greater total distance traveled in the VSR zones at whale-safer speeds. These shipping lines include: CMA CGM; Connaught Shipmanagement HK; COSCO Shipping; CSL Americas; Hong Kong Top Honor Shipping; ISM Ship Management Ltd; Maersk; Marathon Petroleum; MSC; NYK Ro-Ro; Ocean Network Express; OOCL; OSG Ship Management, Inc.; Pilion Navigation; ConocoPhillips - Polar Tankers; Starbulk SA; STX Marine Service Co; Swire Shipping; Teo Shipping Corporation; Tomini Transports LLC; Toyofuji; Wallenius Wilhelmsen; and Yang Ming Marine Transport Corp.

The shipping lines that qualified for the next award tier (Gold, 60-84% cooperation rate) are: Campbell Shipping Company; D'Amico Group; Dockendale; Empire Bulker Ltd.; Evergreen; Hapag-Lloyd; HMC Shipmanagement Co Ltd; Hyundai Glovis; K Line; Mol ACE; Pacific Basin Shipping Ltd.; Raffles Shipmanagement Services; Scorpio Group; Temm Maritime Co Ltd; Unisea Shipping Ltd; Venture Shipping Ltd; Veritas Shipmanagement; and Wan Hai.

BWBS also partners with brands, ports, and product, logistics and freight companies that ship with participating shipping companies, and work to advance opportunities to protect marine biodiversity and air quality in ocean freight. The program Ambassadors are: Sonos, JAS Worldwide, The Block Logistics, Port of Hueneme, Nomad Goods, Peak Design, Who Gives a Crap, Limoneira, Eggboards, Brighten Solar, Business & Pleasure, Summit Coffee and Santa Cruz Bicycles.

The environmental benefits driven by this growing industry participation shows that this program is making an impact.

“It’s been amazing to witness the growth of this program over the last 10 years and the range of impressive environmental benefits achieved. From seven shipping lines reducing speed in 2014 to 49 shipping lines opting in for 2024, this program serves as a shining example of what can be accomplished when government agencies, industry, and conservationists work together,” said Jess Morten with the California Marine Sanctuary Foundation.

Shipping companies and bulk operators interested in learning more can contact Jess Morten at jessica.morten@noaa.gov. Logistics companies, freight forwarders, ports and product companies interested in learning about the Ambassador program can contact Becca Tucker at becca@californiaMSF.org. More information is available at www.bluewhalesblueskies.org.

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Protecting Blue Whales and Blue Skies

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