

Nico Middle East to go paper-free

As a further example of how an increasing number of vessel operators are moving forward to install paperless navigation systems, *Digital Ship* hears from Nico Middle East about its programme to install dual ECDIS aboard all of its vessels

Dubai-based Nico Middle East Limited (NMEL) has decided to fit dual ECDIS (electronic chart display information systems) from PC Maritime on its entire fleet of vessels, which range from anchor-handling tug supply ships (AHTSVs) and subsea construction barges to maintenance support vessels and crew boats.

According to Nico Middle East's general manager, Ron Clark, it no longer makes sense to ignore this technology, even on smaller vessels.

"ECDIS has been fitted to larger ocean going vessels for many years now and we have seen a proliferation of illegal copies on the smaller ships," he said.

"Quite simply our officers do not have the time to dedicate to chart correction that is required for the traditional paper charts and consequently the job tends to be neglected."

"Our decision to put ECDIS on all the vessels in our fleet removes this tedious job from our crews and provides them with an up to date set of charts as well as a much safer navigational aid which takes inputs from the radars and AIS to provide

a full picture to the navigator."

Mr Clark notes that Nico's new 'J' Class FiFi 1 AHTSVs are amongst the first off-shore support vessels of their size, operating in the Arabian Gulf, to have a totally paperless class approved chart system.

The initial order placed by Nico Middle East comprised of eight systems.

Four are allocated to a series of J-class 5150bhp AHTSVs being built in China. The first installation, on *Topaz Jumeirah*, was completed in Singapore in December 2007 and the three other vessels in the series, *Topaz Jebel Ali*, *Topaz Jaddaf* and *Topaz Jafiliya* will all have been equipped by the end of 2008.

Three existing dynamic-positioning (DP2) vessels, the 1999-built cable layer *Team Oman*, the 2002-built subsea construction barge *Team Siam* and the 2002-built 7400bhp maintenance support vessel *Team Muscat*, are also being fitted with dual ECDIS systems, the installations on *Team Oman* and *Team Muscat* having been completed in February 2008.

The eighth vessel to be fitted with the dual ECDIS will be *Topaz Fujairah*, a 30m catamaran crew boat that is due for delivery in October 2008.



Topaz Jumeirah was the first of Nico's vessels to go paperless



'ECDIS provides our crews with a much safer navigational aid' - Ron Clark, Nico Middle East

Commitment

The company decided to move forward with the installation process after an extensive investigation of the PC Maritime system.

"Our choice of PC Maritime as a partner was very much time-related," said Mr Clark.

"We first started talking to them about 18 months ago and not only did they commit a great deal of time and effort to securing the first order for their Navmaster system, they have been extremely supportive during the training and commissioning phases."

"Navmaster stands up well against the others in the market both in terms of quality and price but the service was way ahead of the other players. They

even appointed an agent here in the UAE to support us before we placed our first order."

David Edmonds, managing director of PC Maritime, says he was impressed by Nico's commitment to proceed so quickly with its paperless navigation project.

"It's very encouraging when you find an owner committed to the concept of ECDIS," he said.

"NMEL recognises that by going paperless they are taking a big step towards improving safety. ECDIS greatly improves situational awareness and is an important anti-grounding aid, as well as eliminating a chart-correcting task that either takes up valuable officer time or is not done fully."

"Navigating officers increasingly expect to find ECDIS onboard; it shows commitment on the part of NMEL to give them the tools to do their job efficiently and safely."

Operator Training

As part of the ECDIS deal, PC Maritime has provided initial training in the Gulf onboard NMEL vessels and has arranged for two NMEL superintendents to come to its headquarters in Plymouth, UK, for a three day 'Train the Trainer' ECDIS training course.

To assist companies with their requirements for ECDIS training, PC Maritime says it is developing some further training services, and will be introducing a Type Specific ECDIS training product by the end of 2008.

In addition, the company has also worked with Videotel on the content of its new ECDIS training product, and has provided screen shots from Navmaster to demonstrate ECDIS features such as chart symbology, route-planning, alarms and warnings.

Videotel's ECDIS training product was scheduled for launch in May 2008.

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