

Signed, sealed and delivered

Routine bunker sampling and retention is required by international law, and compliance relies upon a representative sample. At present, it seems that many offshore contractors are unaware of their role in securing compliance, the consequences of which could become increasingly costly as time goes by.

Mike Dines, offshore sales manager, Kittiwake Developments, discusses this issue.

MARPOL 73/78 Annex VI "Regulations for the Prevention of Air Pollution from Ships" came into force in May 2005. This states that the sulphur content of fuel oil used in an Emission Control Area (ECA) must not exceed 1.5% m/m. Actually proving this is the reason for collecting, storing and retaining samples of all fuels used. Some offshore drilling contractors are still not meeting the legislation, as they do not believe that it applies to them. However, Regulation 19 states that fixed and floating platforms, including drilling rigs and similar structures, must comply with the requirements of this Annex.

The Annex states that a fuel sample should be provided by the supplier with the bunker delivery note. In reality, this can mean accepting a sample of unproven origin, or simply no sample at all, which has led to proactive drilling contractors taking the matter in hand and ensuring a sample is taken by doing it themselves.

The fuel oil needs to be sampled directly from the fuel line during the full course of the delivery, as this is the only way to ensure a good sample, representative of the whole delivery. Chris Fisher of Bunker Claims International highlighted the confusion and wrong practice regarding the taking of official MARPOL samples. Getting it right makes the difference between complying with the regulations and simply wasting time and money. To achieve this, there are several sets of guidelines offering advice on how to physically draw a sample. These can be open to interpretation and, to avoid

mistakes, suppliers of sampling equipment provide abridged versions with instructions and advice, making it much easier to sample correctly.

A good sample amount is around one part per million (ppm) of the fuel being delivered. The sampling device chosen will be influenced by the number of samples to be drawn, technical level of staff and budget. With manual drip-type samplers, the sample is taken into a single large "cubitainer", which is attached to the sampler in the presence of the supplier, locked onto the sampler and then sealed with a serial numbered, tamper-evident seal. This lock prevents the sample being interfered with and at the same time prevents the sampling rate valve being tampered with or turned off during delivery.

When a delivery is complete, the cubitainer is shaken to thoroughly mix the sample and poured into a sample bottle which is sealed with serial numbered, tamper evident caps and labelled with compliant labels containing all the information required by the regulations. It is important that this process is carried out in the presence of both supplier and customer. Both parties can then sign the delivery note to say that the sample is fair, representative and has not been tampered with, as if a dispute occurs, this audit trail is vital.

Annex VI stipulates that the sample must be "retained under the ship's control until the fuel oil is substantially consumed, but in any case for a period of not less than 12 months from the time of delivery."

Although introduced in a consistent but often time-delayed manner around the world, there are sections of MARPOL legislation that are open to interpretation. The US Coast Guard recently issued its interpretation of keeping fuel samples under the vessel's control as being physically on board the vessel or rig. Other agencies around the world have previously accepted that the samples may need to be sent ashore for storage as long as they can be produced on request. For international vessels, it is advisable to follow the most stringent interpretation of the regulation.

Ensuring compliance with global legislation ought to be incentive enough to implement sound bunker sampling practices. However, the risk of adverse publicity and subsequent consequences if found guilty of ignoring environmental legislation, which has now been in place for a number of years, is perhaps a more compelling driver.

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