

World Hydrography Day: Hydrography For Maritime Trade

The International Hydrographic Organization (IHO) celebrates World Hydrography Day (WHD) on 21st of June, this year carrying the theme Hydrographic Services - the essential element for maritime trade. This is the anniversary date on which the IHO was created in 1921.

The theme for each year's celebration highlights aspects of the work and the contribution that the IHO makes to the world community. For 2010 the IHO has chosen the theme, 'Hydrographic Services - the essential element for maritime trade'. Maritime trade is extremely important to most countries in the world, and hydrography and the provision of nautical charts are fundamental and underpinning components that contribute to its development and its ongoing success.

It may seem obvious to say that, today, we live in a global world, and it is certainly true that international maritime trade among all the nations and regions of the world is nothing new. From the Phoenicians, through to the Egyptians, the Greeks and Carthaginians, the Chinese, the Polynesians, and Celts, the Vikings, the Omanis, the Spaniards, the Portuguese, the Italians, the British, the French, and the Dutch, the history of the world is a history of exploration and trade by sea. Slowly the great seaborne trades became established. Global maritime trade has effectively permitted an enormous variety of resources to be more widely accessible and has enabled the widespread distribution of our planet's common wealth and to the increase and acceleration of the development of many States.

More than 90% of the world's trade and 60% of the annual world oil consumption are transported by sea routes. Maritime trade is very important for the economies of not only the 154 States with a significant coastline, but to most other countries lying further inland. The prosperity, well-being and ongoing development of States depend very much on the undisturbed, regular and efficient transportation of commodities especially by ship. Shipping has always provided the only really cost-effective method for bulk transport especially over any great distance. Most countries would be seriously affected if ships could not safely navigate the seas and approach ports, harbors and other maritime facilities.

The IHO is the inter-governmental consultative and technical organisation, whose headquarters have been in Monaco since 1921 at the kind invitation of Prince Albert 1er, an illustrious marine scientist and oceanographer of his time. The aims of the IHO are:

- to coordinate the activities of national hydrographic offices;
- to ensure the greatest possible uniformity in nautical charts and documents;
- to foster the adoption of reliable and efficient methods of carrying out and exploiting hydrographic surveys; and
- to foster development in the sciences of hydrography and the techniques employed in descriptive oceanography.

WHD has been recognised by the United Nations General Assembly to give publicity to the work of the IHO at all levels and of increasing the coverage of hydrographic information on a global basis to promote safe navigation, especially in the areas of international navigation, ports and where there are vulnerable or protected marine areas.

Many parts of the world's seas and oceans still remain unsurveyed. The surface of the Moon and Mars are better and more accurately surveyed than much of the Earth's coasts and oceans.

The IHO and its Member States' Hydrographic Offices play a vital role in enabling World maritime trade. The IHO has established 11 international standards and more than fifteen different guidelines for the collection of hydrographic data, the compilation and drawing of charts and associated publications and for the delivery of various other hydrographic services. National Hydrographic Offices around the world then conduct the surveys, and produce the charts, publications and services upon which the world's mariners depend.

Three elements of hydrography underpin maritime trade: the collection of relevant data and information, the availability of nautical charts and publications, and keeping the mariner informed of changing circumstances through Maritime Safety Information services.

Hydrographic Data and Information. Accurate and reliable hydrographic information and data is essential for the production and updating of charts and publications. This is collected by surveying ships operated by experienced hydrographers using the latest equipment and techniques and in accordance with the international standards established by the IHO. The accuracy of the data is a fundamental factor in helping to avoid navigational accidents and safeguard trade. No port can be used and no maritime facility can be approached without appropriate hydrographic data and information being available to ensure the safety of ships.

Nautical charts and publications. Everybody recognizes that no ship sails, no ship can navigate and no ship can reach a port, harbor and other maritime facility without up to date and reliable charts. Charts are essential in enabling mariners to safely navigate under any environmental conditions and to be aware of unseen hazards lying in the sea. The IHO's standards ensure that the world's charts and supporting publications all operate in the same way. This includes the way that they are laid out and, in the case of charts, the symbols and colours that they use.

The world's shipping are increasingly using Electronic Navigational Charts (ENCs) produced by Hydrographic Offices to the strict standards set by the IHO. This is increasing efficiency, effectiveness and safety margins during voyages and consequently helping to further improve maritime trade.

Promulgation of Maritime Safety Information (MSI). The IHO in close cooperation with the IMO and WMO has established a global maritime system, for the broadcast of urgent information to mariners in any part of the world. This makes navigation safer and trade more reliable and effective.

As well as the IHO's extensive programme of standard setting and technical cooperation, the organization supports a training and capacity building program in developing States, so that these States are in a better position to provide hydrographic services for their waters and thereby maximise the benefits of maritime trade at the national level.

In a modern world, put simply: "no hydrographic data and no information means no nautical charts and publications, which, in turn means no effective sea trade!".

Hydrography and nautical charting services contribute to the avoidance of accidents that are not only undesirable outcomes in themselves, but have a negative impact on the supply chain that is at the heart of the global economy.

No matter where you may be in the world, there will be something that either has been or will be transported by sea; whether in the form of raw materials, components or a finished product. The IHO and the hydrographic offices of its Member States provide a fundamental requirement for safe and secure trade in all parts of the world. Trade and consequently the well-being of nations and their peoples depends heavily on hydrography.