

Boost for NOAA Nautical Chart Production

NOAA's development of a new navigational chart processing system moved to initial limited production on 21st September 2011. The new system, which slims down the current map production process while it beefs up performance, represents a technological leap forward in creating the navigational charts used to speed ships and products safety through the nation's maritime transportation system.

"NOAA regularly updates over a thousand nautical charts, adding data and making corrections that are critical to a wide use of applications," explains Capt. John Lowell, director of the Office of Coast Survey. "To produce more navigation products, faster, we developed a single source production system that produces all NOAA chart products from one central database instead of the two production lines used since charting technologies first started changing in the mid-1990s."

The system speeds chart updates to users, presents opportunities for private industry development of customised products and improves data exchange capabilities for multiple maritime uses. For instance, the system will integrate with other information for ocean planning and other coastal uses.

Notably, with the efficiencies gained from the new system, Coast Survey can produce more navigation products, with flexible access to more data, without a corresponding increase in budget or personnel.

While the new system moves into initial production this month, the transition of data covering all US waters will take several years, progressing in sets of charts as geographically located in US Coast Guard Districts. As the data is transitioned to the new system, chart users will see more congruity between paper charts that are now produced on one system and electronic charts produced on another. Under the new system, cartographers will enter the same data into a single system and the changes will be sped along to all associated products.