

South Korea – Discharge of ballast water loaded in Japan

South Korea has expressed concern at the possible pollution of their coast and waters by radioactively contaminated ballast water originating from sources near the damaged Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant in Japan.



In the aftermath of the earthquake and tsunami in Japan in March 2011, leaks have apparently been detected in the tanks containing stored radioactive water used for cooling the damaged reactors at the Fukushima power plant. The South Korean Ministry of Oceans and Fisheries (MOF) has therefore issued the following guidance concerning ballasting and de-ballasting of ships arriving from Japan:

- Vessels that have loaded ballast water within 50 miles of the Fukushima nuclear power plant or within the Japanese ports of Hachinohe, Ishinomaki, Sendai, Soma, Onahama and Hitachi are, in principle, prohibited from visiting South Korean ports.
- If it is necessary to load ballast water in the listed Japanese areas/ports, e.g. for the purpose of ensuring the safety of the vessel in an emergency situation, the vessel should perform a ballast water exchange operation in the open sea prior to entering a South Korean port. The ballast water should be replaced by means of overflowing the tanks and pumping through three times the volume of the ballast tanks' capacity.¹ The vessel should also report the ballast water exchange operation to the Korean Port Authorities when declaring port entry.

The guidance further indicates that the Port Authorities will inspect the relevant vessels arriving from Japan and that vessels found in breach of the guidance will be instructed to leave the Korean port in order to exchange the ballast water in open sea. According to Gard's correspondent in South Korea, the MOF has indicated that it is unlikely that fines or detentions will be imposed in this respect.

In order to avoid potential delays and the associated costs incurred during port entry in South Korea, Members and clients whose vessels have loaded ballast water close to the Fukushima nuclear plant in Japan should note the advice and make every effort to ballast accordingly. All ballasting operations should be carefully and accurately recorded and the documentation presented to the South Korean Port Authorities when preparing for port entry.

We would like to thank Gard's correspondent Hyopsung Shipping Corporation in South Korea for their assistance in the preparation of this alert.

¹ Vessels with ballast vent heads, not designed for or intended to be used for continuous overflow during ballast water exchange should ensure that an alternative method used is in compliance with Regulation D-1 of the Ballast Water Management Convention. Records from the operation should evidence that a ballast water exchange operation with an efficiency of at least 95% volumetric exchange of ballast water has been carried out prior to port entry. See also IMO Res. MEPC.124(53), Guidelines for Ballast Water Exchange (G6).

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