

Ship Report Transcript

Monday, May 13, 2024

By Joanne Rideout

All rights reserved. No use without permission. © 2024. Joanne Rideout/The Ship Report.

It's time for the Ship Report the show about all things maritime. I'm Joanne Rideout. It's Monday, May 13th, 2024.

Let's take a look at marine weather and after that, I'll explain the meaning of a commonly used maritime term that you might have heard and maybe didn't know what it meant.

Today, we have high pressure remaining anchored offshore and maintaining northerly breezes. Thermal low pressure will remain well inland and over the southern Oregon coast into northwest California. Today we have northwest winds 5 to 10 knots, gusting to 15, rising to 10 to 15, with gusts to 20 in the afternoon. Wind waves from the northwest three feet high at 4 seconds apart west swells six feet high at 12 seconds apart.

And we've been paying attention to a different kind of weather report the past few days, and that is space weather regarding solar storms and flares that have been making it possible for people even in Astoria, to see aurora borealis in the night sky. We had quite a show locally here on Friday night, and I know some folks are hoping to see more. You can monitor space weather in a couple of ways that I know of online and on Facebook. You can follow NOAA NWS (for the National Weather Service) Space Weather Prediction Center.

And I also found some apps you can find them by searching for Aurora Alerts and you'll see a bunch of them. They all say that they can give you an idea of what the potential is for seeing northern lights where you are. So if you missed Friday night's show or would like to see them again, that might be a way to keep track of the intensity of the solar flares and see what might be happening here.

Well, today I thought I would explain a term that I've heard used in the maritime industry for decades. And I learned what the term meant as I was interviewing people who worked in the industry. And I didn't think much about it, even though as a word, it's far from intuitive in terms of figuring out what it means just by hearing it in context, which you can do with a lot of words, but not really this one. And that word is bunker.

It's a word that is used to refer to ship fuel, and the term bunkering is the act of loading a ship with heavy diesel fuel, which is what most ships still burn. Now, even though alternative fuels are gaining ground in the maritime industry, most ships are still burning some form of diesel fuel. So this term, bunker & bunkering came up kind of in conversation on Facebook in the context of a great photo that Astoria photographer Scott Saulsbury posted on the ship report community photo page. And that is a group that I started almost a year ago on Facebook to allow local folks to post their photos of vessels on the Columbia, all in one place so they could see each other's pictures. And we have quite a nice group of folks who regularly post wonderful photos. And Scott is a regular contributor to the group and often posts his photos. And they're just terrific.

And he posted a photo of a ship with a barge next to it and captioned it bunkering operations off Pier 39. And that's out in the river here in Astoria. And he and I had a short discussion in comments on that photo about the origin and use of that term bunker or bunkering or even bunkers. I've heard it said. But

like a lot of things in the maritime realm, there's a lot of jargon involved. And if you are interested in learning, you just pick these things up in context and after a while you just learn it so you can understand what people are talking about. I'm sure that to anyone who's listening, who has experience in the maritime industry, you just know what this word means. But that doesn't mean that anybody else without a maritime background knows what it is. And so I thought it would be fun to talk about this today.

And by the way, just an aside, if you want to see some just fabulous photos of the river during that amazing Northern Lights show, it happened here on Friday night. Go to the ship report community photo page or just look up Scott's profile on Facebook: Scott Saulsbury. He is one phenomenal photographer, and he definitely captured some bucket list photos of the aurora borealis that we saw here on Friday night.

Back to bunkering. This is from Wikipedia: "Bunkering is the supplying of fuel for use by ships, and the fuel itself is referred to as bunker. Bunkering includes the logistics of loading and distributing the fuel among available shipboard tanks. The term bunkering originated in the days of steam ships when coal was stored in bunkers. *[So the word has a long history of referring to ship fuel even before the age of diesel.]* Bunkering operations take place at sea ports and include the storage and provision of the bunker ship fuels to vessels." That's Wikipedia.

And I found an even older reference than that to the term bunkering. The term bunkering originates from the word bunk, which has its roots in the Scottish language and refers to a reserve or something which is surplus.

Now, just another aside about this fuel can also be transferred at sea between vessels using hoses and ships that are called replenishment oilers. And we see that in the military. We see those Military Sealift Command replenishment oilers coming in and out of the Columbia here quite often. They are like traveling gas stations for ships and they can travel alongside a ship at sea, put a hose across and then fill the fuel tanks on the ship. And that is a great thing because the ship doesn't have to come into port to get more fuel. It's a great thing for active duty military vessels.

But here today we're talking primarily about ships in port, receiving fuel from barges that come alongside the ship in an anchorage like our Astoria Anchorage, and deliver fuel to them.

Now, the fuel itself is called bunker or bunker oil. It's the name historically, at least for a heavy and quite dirty fuel that ships used for many, many years. It's essentially what's left over after other petroleum refining processes have happened. So it's got a lot of impurities in it. And ships used it because it was cheap and there was a lot of it available.

Regulations have evolved over the years so that ships that are in U.S. territorial waters shifted to less polluting fuels. But now, recently, with the advent of new international regulations called IMO, 2020 ships are either burning less polluting fuel at sea now than they were, or they're using scrubbers to clean some impurities out of the fuel. So the fuel ships are burning now is quite a bit less polluting than it used to be, but that term bunker remains.

And sometimes you see ships on the Columbia releasing what looks like white smoke. I've gotten listener questions about this, you know, as their motoring along. It looks like smoke. But what it is, is steam from those scrubbers. So when you see a ship like that, it's generally an older vessel that has been retrofitted with scrubbers that the emissions are reduced that come out of the ship because of the

scrubbers. But newer ships were designed to burn the new, less polluting fuel, and they don't need the scrubbers to burn that newer fuel.

Now, this doesn't mean that ships no longer emit air pollution. They do, but it's a lot better than it was. And the trend in the maritime industry is toward alternative fuels and zero emissions as a goal by 2050. So future goals for the shipping industry have been outlined in regulations called IMO 2050, which aims for the maritime industry to reach zero emissions by 2050. In addition to that goal, IMO member states agreed on emission reduction milestones of 20% in 2030, and 70% in 2040.

Now the IMO, I've talked about this on the ship report in the past, is the International Maritime Organization, which sets international shipping standards and it has member states, countries around the world that belong to it. IMO currently has 176 member states and three associate members and the U.S. belongs to the IMO.

You've been listening to the ship report the show about all things maritime. I'm Joanne Rideout. You'll find ship schedules and a podcast of this program on my website at shipreport.net.

Ship Report Podcasts also on Apple and Spotify. You'll find marine weather and links to ship schedules and more on my Ship Report Facebook page. Transcripts of the show are available with podcasts.

Thanks for listening and have a great day.