The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Russian Tanker Navigating Obstacles to Alaska

By The Moscow Times

December 28, 2011



ANCHORAGE, Alaska — A Russian tanker is making progress toward an iced-in Alaskan city as it navigates both sea ice and red tape in a quest to deliver fuel.

If everything goes as planned, the tanker Renda could arrive in Nome by the second week in January. Officials say this would be the first winter delivery of fuel products by sea to a western Alaskan community.

Before the tanker can dock at the Dutch Harbor fishing port in the Aleutian Islands to load gasoline, it will need to pass an inspection to operate in U.S. waters. Then it will need a waiver of federal law to load the gasoline and bring it to Nome — that is, if it can go through some 480 kilometers of sea ice around the city of about 3,500 people.

"It is challenging," said U.S. Coast Guard spokesman Chief Petty Officer Kip Wadlow.

Nome normally gets fuel by barge, but a storm this fall prevented the last delivery before winter. Now the plan is to have the Russian tanker deliver 1.5 million gallons of petroleum products.

The tanker left Russia in mid-December and went to South Korea, where it took on more than 1 million gallons of diesel fuel. From there, it was to go to Japan and load 400,000 gallons of gasoline, but international shipping regulations and fierce weather scuttled that plan.

A decision was made to head to Alaska and load gasoline at Dutch Harbor. It then will take another four to five days to reach Nome.

The Coast Guard's only functioning icebreaker, named the Healy, will break ice for the Russian tanker.

The Healy was due back to its homeport in Seattle just before Christmas, but the Coast Guard extended its mission by a month to assist the fuel effort.

The depth of the water will prevent the Healy from getting any closer than about 1.6 kilometers from the port of Nome, Wadlow said. The tanker is equipped with a long hose for offshore delivery, but that plan comes with a host of safety concerns, he said.

"It would be extremely unfortunate if there were an accident — a spill on the ice," Wadlow said.

Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2011/12/28/russian-tanker-navigating-obstacles-to-alaska-a11690