

New AIS system cuts shipping accidents

Posted on 30 April 2013 - 08:48pm

Last updated on 30 April 2013 - 09:23pm

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SHAH ALAM (April 30, 2013): The installation of the automatic identification system (AIS) in small boats of less than 15 tonnes has helped reduce the accident rate in the high traffic waters of the Straits of Malacca, said Malaysian Marine Department (MMD) Maritime Director-General Datuk Ahmad Othman.

The system works by broadcasting information on a ship to other vessels via radio or satellite links. It can tell the ship's current position, course and speed, allowing it to be tracked by other vessels and maritime authorities.

"The drop in accident rates is due to improved monitoring systems as we are installing the AIS in small boats. With the AIS we can start to track small boats and minimise accidents," he said today.

He was responding to statistics in a speech by Transport Minister Kong Cho Ha at the MMD's 60th anniversary celebrations today.

Kong said 102 accidents were reported to the MMD in 2010, 85 cases in 2011 and 40 in 2012.

"On average, 70,000 merchant vessels use the Straits of Malacca annually, and this figure does not include small fishing vessels, of which 30,000 use the strait annually," he said.

Asked about causes of accidents in the strait, Ahmad said most were caused by human elements.

"The general causes include poor monitoring of navigation equipment by ship crews. These accidents usually involve small boats colliding with big ships. However, it has been a while since a big collision occurred since the AIS system had been installed on small boats and big ships."

He also said ship size had steadily increased since the MMD's formation, with ultra-large crude carriers and very large crude carriers tipping the scales at 300,000 tonnes and up. This means the MMD has a bigger role to play to prevent pollution and ensure shipping lane safety.