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China's scrubber coup continues as IMO 2020 looms

Shanghai Bluesoul joins rising tide of Chinese exhaust gas cleaning system suppliers eyeing expansion following OOCL retrofit completed in record time.



With the deadline to comply with IMO 2020 less than six months away, Chinese manufacturers of exhaust gas cleaning systems (EGCS) for ships appear to be gaining traction in the race to seize market share from their Scandinavian rivals. The segment's rising stars include Shanghai Bluesoul Environmental Technology Co. (Bluesoul). The company made waves this summer after completing a retrofit for Great Overseas Container Line (OOCL) in just four months—which, according to the supplier, represents a new world record. The EGCS installation involving the 13,300-ton container ship OOCL Singapore (built in 2014) took place at a CSBC Corp shipyard in Taiwan. It's unclear whether the Hong Kong operator intends to equip more tonnage with scrubbers in the months ahead, but sources say Bluesoul and CSBC are actively pursuing similar projects with other operators in the same segment.



Scrubber units ready to be fitted onto the OOCL Singapore. Photo: Shenzhou.

Waves of change

In late 2018, OOCL outlined plans to begin the transition to low-sulphur fuel in the second half of this year to ensure compliance with IMO 2020 by the 1 January deadline. At the time, this led many industry insiders to believe that scrubbers weren't on the cards for the carrier.

More recently, OOCL published an annual report where management indicated that—in addition to low-sulphur fuel—they would also consider “implementing scrubber technology” as a means of allowing the fleet to continue to burn about what was described as “lower-cost, high-sulphur fuel.”

Bluesoul vice president Jay Zhang says he wouldn't be surprised to see other owners of large containerlines, tankers and bulkers similarly change their tune at some point in the near future amid lingering concerns about the cost and availability of low-sulphur fuel.



SHA SOUL ENVIRONMENTAL TECHNOLOGIES

Photo: Michael Wang/Bluesoul, Jay Zhang.

“The high differential between the price of compliant fuel and #FO 380 (heavy fuel oil) can be foreseen,” he argues. “With a return on investment in as little as one to two years, more and more shipowners will find that EGCS offers the best route to compliance with IMO 2020.”

Denies head East

While Scandinavian scrubber manufacturers have seen ordering slow since the start of 2019 and production capacity remains constrained in their corner, the

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