



Council of Canadian Academies  
Conseil des académies canadiennes

# News Release

## *Canadian waters getting safer, but research gaps limit full understanding of shipping risks*

**Ottawa (April 28, 2016)** – A new workshop report, ***Commercial Marine Shipping Accidents: Understanding the Risks in Canada***, released today by the Council of Canadian Academies (CCA), explores risk by focusing on the likelihood of commercial marine shipping accidents across Canada as well as the potential social, economic, and environmental impacts of such accidents.

“Overall, the evidence shows that Canada’s waters have been getting safer over the past decade, with fewer commercial marine shipping accidents,” said Captain Dr. James R. Parsons, Chair of the Workshop Steering Committee and Academic Director at the Marine Institute of Memorial University. “Commercial marine shipping has benefited from improved traffic control technology, better ship designs, and a strengthened regulatory regime. Accidents do still occur, yet typically do not result in large impacts.”

The workshop report found that both the likelihood of an accident and the severity of its impact differ greatly across Canada’s regions. For example, data show that the St. Lawrence River region experiences the highest level of commercial marine accidents in Canada, but these accidents have been the least likely to lead to casualties or serious injuries. The Pacific Region has the highest level of shipping activity, but has a relatively low risk profile. More research is needed to gain a fuller understanding of the factors that contribute to these regional variations.

The report notes that gaps exist in the available data on the causes of accidents, the stages at which accidents occur, and the frequency of shipments by cargo type and region. It also points out that better data is needed to more fully understand the breadth of pollution events across Canadian waters. With regard to oil spills, the workshop report confirms that while the likelihood of an accident resulting in an oil spill in Canada is low, the potential impact of such an accident would be significant.

“Canada has not experienced a large oil spill in the past decade,” noted Captain Parsons. “But, evidence from around the world suggests that when large spills do occur, the impact on the environment, and the subsequent social, economic, and health impacts, can be substantial.”

Overall Canada has a well-developed oil spill response regime, though recent evidence has identified areas for improvement; providing a timely response, particularly in remote areas, is one example. The workshop report also points to the need for a hazardous and noxious substances (HNS) preparedness and response regime across Canada, as well as further research into how substances classified as HNS behave in a marine environment.

“We are very pleased that the Clear Seas Centre for Responsible Marine Shipping approached the CCA to provide expert advice on such an important topic,” said Dr. Eric M. Meslin, President and CEO of the CCA. “The workshop brought together experts from academia, government, and industry and was informed by evidence from a survey of the marine shipping community.”

The workshop model is one of several approaches the CCA uses to inform policy discussions in Canada and we hope it will be helpful to Clear Seas and to a national discussion about these issues.”

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For more information or to download a copy of the workshop report, visit the Council of Canadian Academies’ website, [www.scienceadvice.ca](http://www.scienceadvice.ca).

### **About the Council of Canadian Academies**

The Council of Canadian Academies is an independent, not-for-profit organization that began operation in 2005. The Council undertakes independent, authoritative, evidence-based, expert assessments that inform public policy development in Canada. Assessments are conducted by independent, multidisciplinary panels of experts from across Canada and abroad. Panel members serve free of charge and many are Fellows of the Council’s Member Academies. For more information about the Council or its assessments, please visit [www.scienceadvice.ca](http://www.scienceadvice.ca).

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