

Protecting Blue Whales and Blue Skies: The 2014 Vessel Speed Reduction Incentive Trial in the Santa Barbara Channel

Shipping is vital to the global economy, but it comes with impacts on public health and the marine environment. In 2014, the Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuary, the Santa Barbara County Air Pollution Control District, and the Environmental Defense Center launched a trial incentive program to slow ships down in the Santa Barbara Channel to reduce air pollution and protect endangered whales. The trial was based on existing successful ship speed reduction programs at the Ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach. Seven global shipping companies participated in the effort and slowed 27 transits to 12 knots or less from July through November in the reduced speed zone, a time period coinciding with the busiest whale season and the prime period for high levels of ozone air pollution. The program resulted in emissions reductions of more than 16 tons of ozone-forming nitrogen oxides and approximately 500 metric tons of regional greenhouse gases--a more than 50 percent reduction from baseline emissions. The trial demonstrated the feasibility of such a VSR program and the willingness of shipping companies to participate in a voluntary, non-regulatory, non-port partnership, providing a solid foundation for rolling out a larger-scale program in 2016.