

# Peak in scrubber-installed boxship fleet

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The number of scrubber-fitted container ships is now at an all-time high of 36% of the global boxship fleet, due mainly to MSC's preference for exhaust-cleaning systems, according to Alphaliner's report.

As of January, there are 10.3 million TEUs of scrubber-installed container ships, up 1.8 million TEUs from a year ago.

MSC accounted for more than 890,000 TEUs in new scrubber-fitted vessels, through an equal combination of newbuildings and second-hand purchases. The Swiss-Italian market leader now has 54% of its fleet fitted with scrubbers, compared with 46% a year ago.

Alphaliner noted that more liner operators are opting for scrubbers due to the surge in oil prices that has resulted in more expensive bunkers.

Ocean Network Express (ONE) contributed the largest year-on-year growth in scrubber-installed vessels, with 40 ships of 600,000 TEUs being fitted with exhaust-cleaning systems. The pan-Japanese line now has scrubbers installed in 33% of its fleet, up from 24% a year ago, surpassing Hapag-Lloyd to become the sixth-largest owner of scrubber-fitted ships.

ONE's move represents a move away from its initial cynicism towards scrubbers when emissions-limiting regulations were effected in 2020.

In 2023, COSCO and Yang Ming also added significant additional scrubber-fitted capacity, increasing their fleet proportion by 7% and 6% respectively.

The odd one out is Israel's ZIM Line, with just nine ships of 70,000 TEUs fitted with scrubbers, ranking it 16th globally in terms of scrubber capacity despite being a top 10 carrier. Many of ZIM's forthcoming newbuilding deliveries are LNG-fuelled although it will charter 12 vessels which, for now, do not run on green fuel.

Alphaliner noted that the price gap between heavy and light fuel has recently improved for scrubber operators after a long decline between mid-2022 and the autumn of 2023. This advantage will be compounded by the diversions from the Red Sea to the Cape of Good Hope.

Alphaliner said, "With a delta of US\$50 per tonne, it is estimated that carriers can pay back the cost of a scrubber retrofit in around six years, and less for newbuildings."

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