

BOLLINGER SHIPYARDS Cuts Steel on Prototype Module of First US-Built Heavy Icebreaker in 50 Years



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Prototype module will become the foundation of new Polar Security Cutter

PASCAGOULA, Miss., – (August 9, 2023) – Bollinger Shipyards LLC (“Bollinger”) has begun cutting steel at Bollinger Mississippi Shipbuilding in Pascagoula, MS on the first of eight prototype modules that will become the foundation of the first U.S. Coast Guard Polar Security Cutter (PSC), USCGC Polar Sentinel (PSC-1) – the first heavy icebreaker to be built in the United States in 50 years.

“Today marks a significant step for both Bollinger Shipyards and the United States,” said Ben Bordelon, President and CEO of Bollinger Shipyards. “After over 50 years, we’re back to building heavy icebreakers. We’re honored that responsibility lies with Bollinger. Beginning work on the first Prototype Fabrication Assembly Unit is an important step closer toward commencing construction on the first Polar Security Cutter. This isn’t just an important milestone for our company, it’s also an important step for our national defense. Simply put, the United States is back in the icebreaker business.”

The hull of a heavy polar icebreaker is required to be much thicker than other Coast Guard cutters because of the pressure exerted on the ship by the surrounding ice. Therefore, before

the full construction process on the PSC program begins, the prototype modules test the new systems, processes, people, and tools that are required to work with the specialized steel. The lessons learned from building the prototype module will be used to help ensure design completeness and improve the quality and efficiency of the manufacturing process.

“We’re relearning how to build this type of ship,” said PSC program manager Capt. Eric Drey. “It’s the first heavy icebreaker built by our nation in 50 years. It’s not just a big day for the Coast Guard, but a big day for the nation.”

Each module requires approximately four months of labor, during which time Bollinger will continue recruiting and training additional members of the workforce to manage the transition to production of the lead hull as the prototype modules are completed.

The Coast Guard’s operational polar icebreaking fleet currently consists of one heavy icebreaker, the 399-foot Coast Guard Cutter Polar Star that was commissioned in 1976, and one medium icebreaker, the 420-foot Coast Guard Cutter Healy that was commissioned in 1999.

ABOUT the Polar Security Cutter (PSC) program

The U.S. Coast Guard requires polar icebreaking capability to support the country’s economic, commercial, maritime and national security needs in the Polar Regions. The new Polar Security Cutters (PSCs) will be national assets that will ensure access to both polar regions and be capable of executing key Coast Guard missions, including defense readiness; marine environmental protection; ports, waterways and coastal security; and search and rescue. The ships will operate worldwide and face the range of extreme environmental conditions found in the polar, tropical and temperate regions.