

PEO-Ships: 'No Shortage of Challenges' in Shipbuilding, Sustainment

ARLINGTON, Va. – The admiral in charge of U.S. Navy shipbuilding said there is no shortage of challenges in building the fleet and keeping it in fighting condition.

Speaking at an Aug. 25 webinar conducted by the Navy League of the United States and sponsored by L3Harris Corp. and Tri-Tec, Rear Adm. Tom J. Anderson, program executive officer-ships, listed the top challenges the Navy faced in optimizing the procurement and sustainment of ships.

At the top of his list are the capacity and capability of the industrial base in a time of change.

“What do we have today, what do we need for tomorrow, and how do we efficiently and effectively transition between the two,” Anderson listed. “It’s not an easy process to change, and we need to do it mindfully.”



Shipyard workers watch last July as the upper bow unit of the future aircraft carrier USS John F. Kennedy is fitted to the primary structure of the ship at Huntington Ingalls Industries Newport News Shipbuilding. U.S. NAVY / Huntington Ingalls Industries by Matt Hildreth

Anderson for one mentioned the supply chain, noting that “any plans we have going forward need to take into account their health and avoid the whipsaw that we do ... to provide stable work to the industrial base.”

Design technology maturity was the second concern that Anderson mentioned during the webinar.

“We need to use what’s on the shelf and figure how best to

apply to the requirements that we have," he said. "That's our fastest path to success. Where there is a requirement that can't be met today, we need to think through how we develop and mature it in a way that allows it to be produced efficiently without the need for going back and making significant changes while we are constructing [a ship]."

"For ships and ship systems which are a little unique, that can mean some form of land-based testing," he said. "How do we get the risk out of that platform before going into the production run and we get to that smooth and efficient production that we need?"

Timing of new starts in ship construction is another consideration, Anderson said, interspersed with stable production lines.

"We can't go change the entire force structure at one time," he said. "We don't have the capability, so what is our programmatic and production bandwidth for new starts? How much can we do concurrently? We need to take into account the expertise both in the Navy and in industry when it comes to new starts, and at the same time we need to account for transition between the production."

Anderson also stressed that stability in the Navy's shipbuilding plan is important, noting that "uncertainty has multiple negative impacts to cost and schedule."

"Significant production runs are more cost-effective in the acquisition of a vessel," he added. "We need to be looking at what the long game is with regard to when we determine we're going to build a platform, how long we're going to build it for. Efficiency comes as a result of repetition."

Also speaking in the webinar were Rear Adm. Eric Ver Hage, commander of the Regional Maintenance Centers, and director, surface ship maintenance and modernization, and John Rhatigan, chairman of the Maritime Machinists Association.

Bryan Clark, senior fellow at the Hudson Institute, served as moderator.