

United States' Lone Heavy Icebreaker Begins Antarctic Deployment

HONOLULU – The Coast Guard Cutter Polar Star arrived Dec. 4 in Pearl Harbor to make final preparations before sailing to Antarctica in support of Operation Deep Freeze 2019, the Coast Guard Pacific Area said in a release.

The 42-year-old Coast Guard cutter is the United States' only operational heavy icebreaker. The crew is scheduled to make their sixth deployment in as many years to directly support the resupply of McMurdo Station – the United States' main logistics hub on Antarctica.

Polar Star recently completed a six-month drydock period where outdated equipment was upgraded or replaced. The 399-foot icebreaker is the only ship in the United States' fleet capable of clearing a path through the Antarctic ice to escort resupply ships to McMurdo Station. The resupply ships deliver cargo and fuel to sustain year-round operations on the remote continent.

Operation Deep Freeze is a joint military service mission in support of the National Science Foundation – the lead agency for the United States Antarctic Program. Since 1955, U.S. Pacific Command has assisted in providing air and maritime support throughout the Antarctic continent. This year marks the 63rd iteration of the annual operation.

The Coast Guard has been the sole provider of the nation's polar icebreaking capability since 1965, and is seeking to increase its icebreaking fleet with six new Polar Security Cutters to ensure continued national presence and access to the Polar Regions.

While in Pearl Harbor, the Polar Star will complete a variety of maintenance and repairs and to take on provisions in preparation for the month-long transit to Antarctica.