



United Kingdom Maritime Pilots' Association

Piloting Zaandam through the Panama Canal – March 2020

The story of the cruise ship Zaandam and the plight of its passengers and crew failing to obtain assistance from maritime administrations on the Pacific coasts of various nations will be known to all. Eventually, the infected ship was allowed to pass through the Panama Canal to reach assistance in the USA.

The canal passage required significant planning of procedures, provision of equipment, training and the onsite assistance of medical protection experts in order to ensure that the health and well-being of the two Panama Canal pilots was not compromised in any way.

What follows is taken from information received directly from Captain Alvaro Moreno, president of the [Panama Canal Pilots Association](#)

Equipment for each pilot

1. Hazmat suit from head to toe. Must be the right fit.
2. Goggles with adequate seal and peripheral view
3. N95 mask or equivalent
4. Two sets of gloves of different colors (to be able to see if the outer gloves tear). The inner gloves must be taped to the end of the suit sleeves (sleeves on the outside/gloves on the inside)
5. Cloth shoes (similar to the ones medical personnel use in operating rooms, but of more resistant material) completely covering your own shoes. The suit must partially cover the cloth shoes (topside). If the suit does not cover the shoes, then the suit must be taped for a proper sealing.
6. Adult diaper. The suit is very hot and the possibility of dehydration is real. Diapers are required because the suit cannot be taken off while on board, so if you need to pee, the diapers will take care of it. No trousers or pants under the suit. Only light underwear or nothing, just the diapers.
7. For Panama's weather it was recommended that the pilots ingest about 500ml of water every hour. No food... just water and only the water brought on board by the pilot.
8. For a proper seal no beard is allowed. We didn't know this, so one of the pilots had to be shaved right there before being dressed.
9. Hand sanitizer gel (alcohol based) was used to clean the gloves every time (before and after) the pilots were to touch anything (equipment or surfaces)... even before and after touching their own water bottles.
10. The pilots took on board a second set/unit of everything (suit, gloves, mask, shoes, goggles, etc) to replace in case of an accident that compromised the seal.



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Training.

All the equipment was handled by hazmat experts who were there to assist and guide the pilots in putting on the equipment, and were also there at the end of the transit (8 hours later) to help them take the equipment off, and disinfect the pilots before they were transported back to where they started the transit.

There is a right way to put on and take off all this equipment and the pilots received that briefing before starting the transit, in case they had to take something off and replace it during the transit.

On Board Procedures

Before the transit both vessels had to sanitize the whole bridge and the areas that were to be used by the pilots to board and reach the bridge.

Only essential personnel were allowed on the bridge during the transit. Everybody else that did not need to be outside their cabins (passengers and crew) were confined into their cabins and were not allowed to be in the balconies.

Post Transit

After the transit the pilots were taken ashore, where they were disinfected by hazmat experts and after that were taken on specially prepared vehicles back to the pilot station.

On the pilot boat that took them ashore, the crew wore protective equipment also and the pilot stayed the whole time on deck not to get too close to the pilot boat crew.

The pilots are now (31st March 2020) under a 14-day quarantine and will, at some point, be tested for CoVid-19. If they come out clean, they will return to business as usual...