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### Crushing Hudson River ice

Updated: 01/27/2009 06:07 AM  
By: Steve Ference

HUDSON RIVER -- When it gets this cold, you can almost imagine the sound you hear is the ice trying to resist being shattered. "I heard it was pretty thick around the Kingston area, down by Westpoint," said a tugboat captain over the radio. "Kind of concerned really around that area."



The experts say it takes two straight weeks - temperatures below 15 degrees - to truly freeze the Hudson River. But it takes only seconds for the US Coast Guard Cutter Penobscot Bay to make an impression.

Lt. S. Marshall Griffin, Jr., USCGC Penobscot Bay Commanding Officer, said, "This seems to be a decent ice year. People are saying this is worse than last year." "Steady course 2-0-0," one of the Coasties driving the ship shouted on the bridge as large mounds of ice floated by. Those floating pieces soon gave way to more solid ice as the Penobscot Bay continued south.

Traveling from the Port of Albany to Kingston, you can quickly see why keeping shipping lanes open is so important come winter.

"This ship is on the waterway to keep things moving. Keep commerce moving," said Lt. Griffin.

Doing that takes a steel hull five-eighths of an inch thick. Combine it with the ship's overall design - the Penobscot Bay often sends basketball-sized chunks of ice flying in the air as it carves a path for other ships through ice several feet thick at times. "Continuous, two feet - up to two feet. Backing and ramming, four feet, upwards of that," said Lt. Griffin.

One of the issues they have to continually deal with in this weather is

**WATCH THE VIDEO**

**Crushing Hudson River ice**

The frigid temperatures we've been feeling over the past few weeks have turned the Hudson River to choppy ice, as thick as a foot or more in places. Our Steve Ference takes you aboard US Coast Guard Cutter Penobscot Bay - a ship that's made specifically to cut through the ice in order to keep shipping open even in the coldest of times.

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that the ice will pile up on itself and refreeze into larger chunks. It's tough to show you on television, but as the ship cuts through the ice you can feel it forcefully shudder.

"The wake is one of our tools," said Lt. Griffin. "To get the wake you need the speed. The hull was designed to maintain max speed through the ice."

The crew of 18 - includes Edgar the Dog - the youngest, most experienced Coastie on board, all traveling the Hudson day after day to make sure heating oil and other supplies can get where they're needed.

"Ice breaking duty is unique. Not a lot of people get the opportunity to do it," said Lt. Griffin.

Working in the coldest of conditions, they leave an easier path for others in the cutter's wake.

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