Beaufort Gyre Exploration Project: Dispatch 2: Underway!

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We were informed last night that we would be getting underway at 9:00 a.m. this morning. Looking at the engine specifications for the CCGS Louis S. St-Laurent, five MAK diesels, I expected them to roar to life before we started moving. In fact, while we were setting up camera equipment, I noticed a slight rocking in my cabin and figured it was a just a passing swell. Only when I reached the main science laboratory a few decks above, did I realize that we were already moving, with only a slight hum permeating the ship. Who knew that 27,000 diesel horsepower could be so quiet?

The day was largely filled with more preparations before our first science station sometime tomorrow. This included a fire drill to test our ability to muster to the proper station (which just means we have to meetup in the right spot). All of us supernumeraries (Canadian Coast Guard [CCG] language for onboard personnel that are not part of the Coast Guard itself) have the same muster station, which is the helicopter hangar on the back of the boat. After we muster, an alarm sounds, sending us to the proper lifeboat station, which we have to know ahead of time (it is printed on the closet of our rooms). Go to the wrong station and we might get a good-natured ribbing.

With the fire drill out of the way, it was time to get fitted for survival suits. Survival suits are critical if we have to abandon ship in these cold Arctic waters. Hypothermia sets in rapidly and without them we would not survive long. In the event of an emergency, the CCG wants to know what size suit to have ready for everyone on board. Trying on survival suits isn't like an average clothing store visit. They are bulky, awkward, tight-fitting, and have industrial-strength zippers that take a bit of muscle to close. Getting them on is one part flopping like a fish and one part bad dance moves.

After everyone was fitted for their survival suits, more science preparations continued for work tomorrow. Everyone is busy moving equipment into place, calibrating their scientific instrumentation, organizing their work areas, and meeting to outline sampling plans. In addition to our first science station tomorrow, we also have to retrieve a wayward Ice-Tethered Profiler (ITP) that went for an ill-advised jaunt on the seafloor. Hopefully the weather will not hamper work. As we moved from the Coronation Gulf to the Amundsen Sound, the mood of the ocean changed from calm to rolling, white-capped, and angry. Finishing up this post, I am enjoying a free roller coaster ride. More updates to come!

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