

Media release

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AkzoNobel partners with Barrier Group and DroneOps to develop drone technology for remote ballast water tank inspection

AkzoNobel's Marine Coatings Business, the supplier of International® coatings, Barrier Group, a major oil and gas tanker operator, and DroneOps have today announced a new collaboration to develop a drone capable of remotely inspecting ballast water tanks and offshore wind farms, significantly improving accuracy, efficiencies, as well as the health and safety of ships' crews and inspection personnel.

The project, code named RECOMMS (Remote Evaluation of Coatings and Corrosion on Offshore Marine Structures and Ships), will use advanced virtual reality technology and semi-autonomous operation of a drone to deliver safer, more accurate evaluations of ballast water tanks and other enclosed or difficult to access spaces/areas on vessels and offshore structures, including inspections of coatings and corrosion. Traditionally, these inspections are carried out by crew, surveyors or independent inspectors. Such inspections are a risky activity that represents one of the most common causes of work-related fatalities in the industry.

By replacing human inspections with a drone, routine maintenance can be monitored remotely in real time by office-based staff, with instant feedback available to the vessel or offshore structure's superintendent.

RECOMMS has been fully funded by AkzoNobel, Barrier Group, Drone Ops Ltd, with part funding from Innovate UK and additional expertise provided by Marine Technical Limits Ltd, Safinah Ltd and Elcometer Ltd. Together, the partnership offers a complete view of the issues and challenges associated with enclosed space inspections, including coatings expertise and consultancy, drone building, an in-depth working knowledge of current repair and inspection practices, and ownership of marine structures. As the project progresses, the drone will undergo flight trials at AkzoNobel's UK-based coating test block, and Barrier Group's indoor training facility, with the drone's completion and launch, planned for October 2017.

Michael Hindmarsh, spokesperson for RECOMMS and Business Development Manager at AkzoNobel's Marine Coatings Business, said: "Surveys of enclosed spaces and ballast water tanks are an essential part of routine maintenance on board vessels and offshore structures, and are increasingly critical for ship owners. However inspecting these areas thoroughly can require working at height, entering confined spaces, and negotiating slippery surfaces that could be poorly lit, all of which are high-risk activities that the maritime industry is keen to address."

"Using the unique expertise and experience of our partners and supporters, RECOMMS aims to utilise the rapid development of drone and autonomous technologies to make remote inspections of ballast water tanks and other enclosed spaces possible. This in turn will reduce costs, increase efficiency and most importantly, significantly reduce risk to human life during essential maintenance."

RECOMMS believes the successful introduction of its drone will lead to improvements in the future structural design of ballast water tanks and other enclosed spaces, including the addition of radio frequency identification (RFID) markers that will make navigation of structures by drones faster and

easier. In the longer term, drone inspections also have the potential to ensure a systematic and consistent approach to enclosed space inspection by crew, producing data readily available for shore based staff, flag states and class societies.

About AkzoNobel

AkzoNobel creates everyday essentials to make people's lives more liveable and inspiring. As a leading global paints and coatings company and a major producer of specialty chemicals, we supply essential ingredients, essential protection and essential color to industries and consumers worldwide. Backed by a pioneering heritage, our innovative products and sustainable technologies are designed to meet the growing demands of our fast-changing planet, while making life easier. Headquartered in Amsterdam, the Netherlands, we have approximately 45,000 people in around 80 countries, while our portfolio includes well-known brands such as Dulux, Sikkens, International, Interpon and Eka. Consistently ranked as a leader in sustainability, we are dedicated to energizing cities and communities while creating a protected, colorful world where life is improved by what we do.

Not for publication – for more information

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