

US to stop printing nautical charts (Update)

October 22 2013, by Seth Borenstein



In this undated photo made available by NOAA, mariners use a printed nautical chart aboard their ship. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration announced Tuesday, Oct. 22, 2013 that the traditional heavy paper lithographic nautical charts will stop being printed next April. Capt. Shep Smith, head of NOAA's chart division, said the agency will still chart the water for rocks, shipwrecks and dangers, but mariners will have to see the information using private on-demand printing, PDFs and electronic maps. (AP Photo/NOAA)

The U.S. government is going into uncharted waters, doing away with deep-sixing the giant paper nautical charts that it has been printing for mariners for more than 150 years.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration announced Tuesday that the traditional brownish heavy paper charts won't be printed after mid-April.

Capt. Shep Smith, head of NOAA's marine chart division, said the agency will still chart the water for rocks, shipwrecks and dangers, but mariners will have to see the information using private on-demand printing, PDFs and electronic maps.

"Think of them as the roadmap of the ocean," said Smith. "The navigational charts tell you what's under the water, which is critical for navigation."

But now most people use the on-demand maps printed by private shops, which are more up-to-date and accurate, Smith said.

Still, NOAA sells about 60,000 of the old lithographic maps each year, for about \$20 apiece, the same price it costs to print them.

The trouble is that NOAA does not print them, but the Federal Aviation Administration does. And they do not want to anymore to save some money, Smith said. The FAA took over federal chart-making in 1999 and on Oct. 15 told NOAA it was going to stop the presses, according to the ocean agency.



This undated photo made available by NOAA shows a computer displaying an electronic nautical chart aboard a ship. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration announced Tuesday, Oct. 22, 2013 that the traditional heavy paper lithographic nautical charts will stop being printed next April. Capt. Shep Smith, head of NOAA's chart division, said the agency will still chart the water for rocks, shipwrecks and dangers, but mariners will have to see the information using private on-demand printing, PDFs and electronic maps. (AP Photo/NOAA)

It costs NOAA about \$100 million a year to survey and chart the nation's waters and it will still spend the same money, but provide the information in the less traditional way.

Sailors say they will miss the charts, which also get used as decorations.

"It's the nautical history, you know pirates and ships," said Newburyport, Massachusetts, harbormaster Paul Hogg, who has a chart on his office wall. "It seems more nautical. There's just kind of, like, a feel to it."

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