

Australian icebreaker rescues ailing Antarctic base worker

March 23 2015

A seriously ill worker has been evacuated by helicopter from Australia's Antarctic station to an icebreaker ship in a dramatic round-the-clock rescue.

The Aurora Australis, with 114 people on board, had set sail Tuesday from the Davis station on the frozen continent, only to receive an emergency call to return two days later after a tradesman fell gravely ill. © 2015 AFP

The ship battled back through heavy sea ice to arrive late Saturday and finally made the helicopter transfer Sunday night.

"The team have been working through the weekend in very cold, below minus 10 degrees, and at times snowy conditions," Australian Antarctic Division operations manager Robb Clifton said.

"Before the patient was transferred we did several test runs to make sure the operation went as smoothly as possible."

By Monday morning the ship was 120 nautical miles out of Davis, with a further 100 nautical miles of ice to navigate before reaching open ocean en route to Hobart, some two weeks away.

The icebreaker is expected to reach the Tasmanian port around April 4.

The sick worker was not named but the Antarctic Division's Polar Medicine Unit said "the transfer went smoothly and the man, a member of the trades team, is in a serious but stable condition in the ship's medical facility".

In calm weather, the crew on board the ship had worked in shifts to take on enough fuel supplies for the return voyage.

The ship's doctor was flown ashore to assess the

worker, whose condition has not been revealed.

Davis is a permanent Australian base supporting a wide variety of scientific research. It is home to about 120 people over the southern summer and 18 during winter.

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