

'Stuck in our own experiment': Leader of trapped team insists polar ice is melting

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Dec. 27, 2013: In this image provided by Australasian Antarctic Expedition/Footloose Photography the Russian ship MV Akademik Shokalskiy is trapped in thick Antarctic ice 1,500 nautical miles south of Hobart, Australia. (AP)

The leader of a scientific expedition whose ship remains stranded in Antarctic ice says the team, which set out to prove climate change, is "stuck in our own experiment."

But Chris Turney, a professor of climate change at Australia's University of New South Wales, said it was "silly" to suggest he and 73 others aboard the MV Akademik Shokalskiy were trapped in ice they'd sought to prove had melted. He remained adamant that sea ice is melting, even as the boat remained trapped in frozen seas.

"We were just in the wrong place at the wrong time."

- Professor Chris Turney, leader of trapped expedition

"We're stuck in our own experiment," the Australasian Antarctic Expedition said in a statement. We came to Antarctica to study how one of the biggest icebergs in the world has altered the system by trapping ice. We ... are now ourselves trapped by ice surrounding our ship.

"Sea ice is disappearing due to climate change, but here ice is building up," the Australasian Antarctic Expedition said in a statement.

Turney later told FoxNews.com the ice surrounding his ship is old, rather than recently formed, and likely from a particular 75 mile-long iceberg that broke apart three years ago. Climate change may have prompted the iceberg to shatter and float into the previously open sea where the mostly Australian team finds itself stranded, Turney said.

"The ice was swept across to this area by the South-East wind, its pieces creating a knock-on domino effect," Turney told FoxNews.com, speaking from a tent erected on the stranded ship's top deck. "We were just in the wrong place at the wrong time."

But the situation has global warming skeptics poking fun at the scientists.

"Cute how these Warmists who hate fossil fuels take a trip to the Antarctic to show just how horrible fossil-fueled climate change is, then need rescue from their fossil-fueled trip by other fossil-fueled ships and helicopters, which still can't rescue them," wrote one blogger on [Pirate's Cove](#).

The website [Newsbusters](#) said much of the media has bent over backward to avoid linking the ship's current fate with its mission.

"Somewhere far, far to the south where it is summer, a group of global warming scientists are trapped in the Antarctic ice," read a post on the site. "If you missed the irony of that situation, it is because much of the mainstream media has glossed over that rather inconvenient bit of hilarity."

So far, ice breakers have been unable to get closer than 10 miles from the stranded ship, which is surrounded by ice up to 10 feet thick. Stuck since Christmas Eve, it is about 100 nautical miles east of the French base Dumont D'Urville, and about 1,500 nautical miles south of Brisbane.

Turney's team is studying climate change, as well as how wildlife is adapting to it. He noted that numerous penguins have traipsed across the ice from the nearby mainland to curiously observe the explorers.

A Chinese ice breaker was unable to reach the ship, and another vessel, the Australian icebreaker Aurora Australis, got to within 10 nautical miles of the stranded ship but couldn't see it through a driving blizzard, and had to turn back to open water. Turney told FoxNews.com his team is in good spirits, though it only has 10 days of food supplies.

Icebergs pose an even greater danger to the ship than the surface ice that now has the ship in its grip, because they can pierce the hull of a ship like the Akademik Shokalskiy, in a Titanic scenario . Lisa Martin, of the Australian Maritime Safety Authority, which is coordinating rescue attempts from their New South Wales headquarters told FoxNews.com icebergs have been seen in the area.

'There are icebergs around,' agreed Turney. "[The ship] is not a good position."

The Aurora Australis is standing by in open water about 18 nautical miles east of the stranded ship, and could attempt another rescue once weather conditions improve, according to the Australian Maritime Safety Authority.

The best scenario for the scientists, agrees Turney, would be that the Aurora would be able to make a path through the ice, and somehow assist the Akademik Shokalskiy's crew to turn their vessel around – not the easiest task when hemmed in by solid pack ice – so that it could follow the Australian icebreaker back into the safety of open water, and all the expedition's passengers could stay comfortably on board.

But indications are that the 74 will have to be evacuated. Turney says that the captain of the Aurora has already offered specialized storage space for samples collected during the expedition. And a helicopter from a nearby Chinese ship is standing by to land on the ice next to the stranded ship and transfer the team, sources say, probably to the Aurora.

Paul Tilsley is a South Africa-based freelance journalist. Follow him at @PaulTilsley