

Centennial Middle School teacher Bill Schmoker heads to Arctic Ocean

Local teacher will spend five weeks aboard icebreaker

By **Amy Bounds**, Camera Staff Writer
Boulder Daily Camera

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Students at Boulder's Centennial Middle School this fall will have a firsthand view of a scientific research project in the Arctic Ocean through their science teacher.

Centennial's Bill Schmoker is one of 13 teachers from across the country chosen to participate in various polar research expeditions this year as part of the PolarTREC program funded by the National Science Foundation.

More info

To follow Bill Schmoker's journal or learn more about the project, go to polartrec.com/expeditions/international-continental-shelf-survey.

"I'm very excited to be a part of a very meaningful project," Schmoker said. "We'll be in the ice. I'm excited to see pack ice and frozen Arctic Ocean. I know in my lifetime, there's a chance it's going to be going away."

Schmoker, a 17-year teaching veteran, will join U.S. and Canadian oceanographers for five weeks aboard an icebreaker ship in the Arctic Ocean. The researchers are surveying the underwater continental shelf lying north of the United States and Canada.

Information from the cruise will help the United States and Canada determine where they have rights over the seafloor's natural resources, including oil and gas resources.

Schmoker leaves Boulder on July 30, with the ship embarking Aug. 2 and returning Sept. 6. Before this trip, he said, he's never been aboard a ship longer than a day.

"For five weeks, it's going to be a really different experience," he said.

The research team will board the ship in Dutch Harbor, Alaska, and traverse the Bering, Beaufort and Chukchi seas before disembarking in Barrow, Alaska.

The joint U.S.-Canada research cruise will use two icebreakers to collect data to identify the edge of the continental shelf. Schmoker will be aboard the 420-foot-long U.S. Coast Guard cutter Healy, which will break ice and collect data to map the geology of the seabed.

The 28 scientists aboard the Healy also will collect seafloor samples through coring and dredging, make ice observations, and collect water samples and monitor marine mammals and ocean noise.

Schmoker's role is three-fold: He will learn from the researchers, deepening his scientific knowledge to improve his teaching. He will serve as a research assistant and deck hand, helping out where needed. And he will serve as a bridge between the scientists and the public, sharing information.

Though the trip will require him to miss the first three weeks of the school year, he said, he's planning to interact with his students daily. He will record his experiences in an online journal, answer student questions and -- at least once -- talk to his students by satellite phone.

He also plans to develop lesson plans based on what he learns, serve as a resource for other teachers and continue to help the researchers with their outreach efforts.

"I want to be a bridge, to present the science to a greater audience," he said.

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