

Polar bears - Protection

Protection against polar bears during the expedition

Polar bears are a severe danger for working on the ice or onshore in the Arctic.

The Alfred Wegener Institute carries out a training for protection against polar bears and provides weapons for the expedition.

For each group working on the ice or onshore 2 people need either to possess a German hunting license or take part in a 2 days firearm training conducted by AWI. Only these persons are allowed to carry AWI-firearms.

A maximum of 5 rifles and 5 flare pistols can be used onboard RV Polarstern.

The training is valid for 3 years (until 31.12. of a year) and has to be repeated afterwards.

The cruise leader contacts the relevant person at AWI before the expedition in order to discuss the usage and number of weapons. A polar bear protection plan must be made with risk assessment and handling instruction.

Contact in case you need to participate in a training.

This chapter refers to special regulations on the operation sites. Regulations and laws concerning weapons of the respective operation regions must be followed. If no national law is applicable the German law is valid. If different regulations may apply the stricter one is decisive.

Polar bears in the Arctic (Photo: Dr. Mario Hoppmann)



Hand over to the weapon advisor onboard

Weapons and ammunition will be handed over by the captain to the weapon advisor solely shortly before reaching the operating area. The cruise leader has to name a weapon advisor before the expedition begins. He will be named in the operation plan and will be instructed by AWI's weapon advisor before the cruise. He is the authority for all users of weapons including the cruise leader. In case of justified doubts the captain has the right to refuse the weapon advisor assigned by the cruise leader.

The captain has the authority to control the weapon safe at any time. After leaving the operating area the weapons will be cleaned and unloaded and stored in the weapon safe. The keys will be handed over to the captain.

The weapon advisor is responsible for cleaning, maintenance and safe handling of the weapons.

Responsibilities of the weapon advisor and his deputies

- safekeeping of weapons and ammunition
- issue and withdrawal to users after checking certificates of participation in the AWI Training
- refusal to hand over weapons due to personal assessment or special incidents
- report about loss or damage of weapons to Bremerhaven
- instructions in weapon usage
- taking back the weapons and check their condition

Responsibilities of the bear guard

On board

Further instructions will be given on board by the master.

On the ice

As there are maximum 5 weapons onboard only up to 5 groups may operate on the ice at the same time.

Each working group must have 1 bear guard solely watching out for polar bears. He always carries the weapon with him and must not take over other tasks.

Additionally, the vicinity of the ship is observed by a participant with binoculars from the bridge deck. He/she will alarm the groups on the ice in case of a polar bear sighting by vhf-radio or ships horn signal.

The helicopter crew may takeover the polar bear watch during helicopter operations. The pilots usually have taken part in the AWI seminar.

Attention

- transportation of weapons on board takes place only in the outside areas, unloaded and with open lock
- partial loading and unloading is done only outside the ship, in a safe direction and towards the ground
- the weapon must be dried after use and, if necessary, lightly oiled (inside and outside)
- never point the weapon at persons (even unloaded)

The bear guard has the responsibility for the weapon and its safe handling. An investigation about the course of events will be initiated in case of an accident with weapons in order to clarify the questions of guilt and claims for compensation. The bear guard is eventually personally liable. If the general regulations for usage of weapons are violated during an expedition, the respective person will not be handed a weapon anymore.