

**STATEMENT OF  
J. ARNOLD WITTE, PRESIDENT  
AMERICAN SALVAGE ASSOCIATION  
ON  
WRECK SURVEY, OIL DETECTION AND REMOVAL  
TO PROTECT THE MARINE ENVIRONMENT  
BEFORE THE  
U.S. COMMISSION ON OCEAN POLICY  
BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS  
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Mr. Chairman, members of the Committee, thank you for this opportunity to present an important issue concerning coastal and ocean protection; one of specific importance to the Northeast region of the United States from New Jersey to Maine.

I am J. Arnold Witte, President of the American Salvage Association. On behalf of our executive board, and members, I extend my thanks to you and to Congress for your commitment to the oceans and for your efforts to protect the marine environment.

#### INTRODUCTION

Many countries around the world have recognized the environmental threat posed by the cargo and/or bunker oils and chemical cargoes remaining aboard shipwrecks located in their respective waters, and that the time had long since come when action must be taken to deal with those pollution threats.

Examples of governmental action in this area of environmental protection include the pioneering wreck survey work of the United States led by the U.S. Coast Guard in 1967, as reported on below; the accomplishment of the Norwegians with the removal of oil from the war wrecks *BLUCHER* and *NORVARD*, both on the bottom of Oslo Fjord; the more recent work of the U.S. Coast Guard in the case of the barge *CLEVECO* located in Lake Erie; the work of the Finns in the case of the passenger/vehicle ferry *ESTONIA*, resting on the bottom of the Baltic Sea; the effort of the Canadians with the barge *IRVING WHALE* located off Prince Edward Island in the Gulf of Saint Lawrence; the of the Koreans with the wrecks of the *YU-IL* No. 1 and the *MARINE FUEL* No. 2, both located off the coast of South Korea; the work of the Dutch in the case of the wreck of the *SPYROS ARMENAKIS*, submerged in the Westerschelde; the recent work of the French with the tankers *ERIKA* and *IEVOLE SUN*, both situated off their coast; the current work of the U. S. Coast Guard to remove oil from the tanker *JACOB LUCKENBACH*, located off the coast of California; and the coming work of the U.S. Navy to remove oil from the U.S.S. *MISSISSINEWA*, at Ulithi Atoll, Micronesia.

Now, in light of the need to provide for a heightened level of marine environmental protection, and with the benefit of today's capabilities, the United States must address the threat to the ocean environment posed by the aging population of shipwrecks located off its coasts.

## AMERICAN SALVAGE ASSOCIATION

The American Salvage Association represents a group of eleven of the leading professional salvage companies that have responded to the overwhelming majority of the most serious marine casualties that have occurred in the United States over the course of the past two decades. While remaining independent and competitive, the individual companies making up the Association recognize a common interest in promoting the value of salvage, more importantly, by sharing information and experience, the group can together improve the national salvage, marine environmental protection, wreck removal, and harbor clearance response capability.

The American Salvage Association Mission Statement perhaps best describes the reason for its formation, its vision for goals to be attained and its value to the United States.

The role of the American Salvage Association is to:

Ensure that our membership is committed to standards of readiness, conduct and performance that provide the nation an adequate salvage response.

Educate the general public as to the role of the marine salvor in protecting life, the environment and property from the consequences of the perils of water transportation.

Promote cooperation among our members to assure a most effective, successful response in major incidents.

Promote issues of salvage safety when working in a marine environment.

Promote training for today's response as well as anticipating and planning for the changes certain to evolve in the future.

Provide standard contracting options for salvage and wreck removal in order to eliminate negotiating delay and thereby promote prompt casualty response.

Promote preplanning among owners, underwriters, and regulatory agencies before the actual event.

Promote and encourage a regulatory framework that will result in prompt, effective response.

Promote communication and cooperation with all those potentially affected by the consequences of a marine casualty.

Promote information exchange and cooperation with other national and international trade associations and regulatory agencies for the benefit of transportation by water.

## VESSEL DETERIORATION, OIL ESCAPE AND MARINE POLLUTION

The risk of a major pollution incident will exist as long as bunker and/or cargo oils or other petroleum and chemical cargoes are not properly removed from shipwrecks. Studies performed have demonstrated that among other possibilities plate perforation and oil escape can be expected from corrosive pitting, and that corrosion rates have been found to increase dramatically after the first twenty (20) years of submersion; anodic welds in the marine environment can fail in as little as 17 years owing to dissimilarity of metals in weld areas, again resulting in oil escape; the wasting of rivets and the resulting opening or loss of individual plates or strakes of plates will result in the gross loss of oil; spontaneous opening of hatches can occur as a result of the failure of hatch dogs due to the wasting of dissimilar metals, or by removal due to the fouling of fish nets or the work of misguided sport divers; and the localized loading effects of hogging or sagging of the hull, and longitudinal or transverse racking resulting from a wreck's unnatural position of rest on the bottom, can ultimately result in the loss of oil and other chemical cargoes.

## WRECKS LOCATED OFF THE COASTS OF THE UNITED STATES

In 1967, following the grounding of the tanker TORREY CANYON and the subsequent extensive pollution of the European coast, President Johnson directed the Secretaries of Interior and Transportation to undertake a study to determine how to best meet the national need to address the problem of oil pollution. As a part of that study, the Secretary of Transportation directed the Commandant of the Coast Guard to investigate one or more tankers sunk on the United States continental shelf by enemy action during World War II. The U.S. Coast Guard, with assistance from the U.S. Navy Supervisor of Salvage, then conducted this limited investigation.

The report of this work, entitled "Sunken Tanker Project Report," is an interesting document, interesting for a number of reasons including the facts that 1.) of the total population of vessels that have been lost off the coasts of the United States, with little exception only U.S. flag tankers lost in shallow waters (<200 ft.) were considered, of which only four (4) vessels were inspected; 2.) an additional 35 years of vessel deterioration have passed since the time of this first and last survey when limited inspection was conducted; 3.) the United States has an altogether different level of concern for marine environmental protection now than it did; and 4.) the United States now has a greater technological capability to survey and recover oil from wrecks.

Beyond the larger population of war wrecks referred to but not considered by the USCG Sunken Tanker Project, there are numerous more recent merchant vessel losses worthy of consideration. Examples of shipwrecks located in the Northeast region of the United States capable of impacting the marine environment include the wreck of the MARINE ELECTRIC resting on the bottom approximately thirty (30) miles off the coast of Chincoteague Island, Virginia, and the stern section of the STOLT DAGALI resting on the bottom approximately seventeen (17) miles off the coast of Seaside Heights, New Jersey.

More specifically, the MARINE ELECTRIC broke into three (3) sections and went down in 120 feet of water off the coast of Virginia during a winter storm during February 1983. At the time she was carrying approximately 545 tons of bunker oil in two (2) after bunker tanks. Based upon the extensive USCG and National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) investigations and reporting of this casualty at the time, there is every reason to believe that the bunkers remain on board still today.

The Norwegian tanker STOLT DAGALI was cut in two as a result of a collision with the luxury liner SHALOM which occurred off the coast of New Jersey in 1964. At the time, STOLT DAGALI was en route from Philadelphia for New York, thence to Rotterdam. While her fore body remained afloat and was salvaged, her stern section, containing her bunker tanks, went down. No official American inquiry was conducted and no casualty report was issued in this case as no U.S. flag vessel was involved and the casualty occurred outside U.S. territorial waters. Nevertheless, owing to divers' reports of her situation on the bottom, there is reason to believe that a substantial volume of bunkers remain on board.

One of the war wrecks inspected and reported on in the "Sunken Tanker Project Report", the British tanker COIMBRA, is still thought to pose a hazard to the marine environment. Laden with a cargo of lubricating oil in support of the war effort, and while in a position approximately twenty (20) miles south of Shinnecock Inlet, Long Island, New York, the COIMBRA was attacked by a German submarine and, after being struck by a well placed torpedo, was put down in three (3) pieces. Notwithstanding the findings of the 1967 survey, this wreck has long since been recognized as a continuing source of oil pollution, one that has given rise to a number of beach remediation operations along the South Shore of Long Island. Beyond this, published accounts concerning this casualty indicate that there are as many as 28,500 barrels of lubricating oil remaining on board in eight (8) cargo tanks that were not inspected during the 1967 survey.

## REQUIRED ACTION

The MARINE ELECTRIC, the STOLT DAGALI and the COIMBRA are offered only as examples of a much larger population of shipwrecks deserving of consideration, survey and, as found to be necessary on a case by case basis, oil removal operations. The threat to the environment that these wrecks represent is a most important issue for coastal and ocean protection; one of specific concern to the Northeast region of the United States as well.

The oil contained in these wrecks poses serious environmental risks for the United States' eastern seaboard. Degradation of the wrecks' hulls and tank plating ultimately will cause the oil tanks to fail, allowing the oil to escape. Even today, these wrecks are known sites of oil leaking into the environment. These three wrecks, among many others, appear to be environmental disasters waiting to happen. These potential disasters will become realities if no action is taken. The cost to the public of removing the oil from the wreckage now, while it is still contained, is significantly less than the costs will be if the

oil is allowed to escape into the environment with the attendant destruction of natural resources, aquatic mammals and fishery habitats, and significant economic losses suffered by seaside communities.

Lest anyone think that these three wrecks, or the greater population of wrecks located off the coasts of the United States, do not pose a threat to the environment all he or she need do is look at the current case of the JACOB LUCKENBACH. A shelter deck type C-3 ocean freight vessel built of steel in 1944, the JACOB LUCKENBACH sank as a result of a collision in approximately 176 feet of water, 17 miles southwest of the Golden Gate Bridge, San Francisco, California on July 14, 1953.

So serious was the result of the long persistent escape of bunker oil from the JACOB LUCKENBACH that in a statement released on February 8, 2002, California Governor Gray Davis said, "I would like to thank the Department of Fish and Game's Office of Spill Prevention and Response and the U.S. Coast Guard for their tireless efforts in spearheading the search for the source of the oil spill that has depleted California's offshore bird population over the last ten years." "Now that the source of the oil has been identified and the team (government and industry) prepares for the oil recovery operation," Governor Davis said, "I reaffirm my continuing support, and look forward to the day when this threat is finally eliminated."

With today's capability and technology including the availability of both moored and dynamically positioned (DP) project support vessels, work class and 'eyeball' remote operated vehicles (ROVs), proven surface and saturation diving capabilities, traditional "hot-tapping" and remote controlled offloading systems (ROLS), subsea oil heating systems, the noninvasive identification of oil and emulsions in ship's hulls, advances in oil/water separation capabilities and waste-stream minimization, a greatly expanded oil pollution response capability (OSROs), etc., coupled with the project experience already gained here and around the world, the professional American salvage community's ability to address the threat to the coastal and ocean environment posed by these wrecks has never been better.

The American Salvage Association and its members are committed to providing the U.S. Coast Guard with the best technology and oil recovery services available in the maritime world today.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, I want to commend and thank you and the Commission for your commitment to the oceans, for your efforts to protect the marine environment, and for your consideration of this issue. Our hope is that with your support, Congress and the Administration will provide the U.S. Coast Guard with both the mandate and the financial support that it will need to address and eliminate the threat of wreck related oil pollution; the time has long since come for action.

Thank you, again, for the opportunity to present this important issue. I would be happy to take any questions.