

BY JOHN A. WITTE JR., PRESIDENT, AMERICAN SALVAGE ASSOCIATION

AT THE READY

www.americansalvage.org

As those of us who work in the marine industry are very much aware, without maritime access for the import of goods into the U.S., life in the Continental United States will certainly suffer. While the United States has the capability to be self-sufficient in most of its commodities, the reality of our present situation is that we are heavily dependent upon foreign imports for any number of petroleum and non-petroleum based commodities, products and necessities. While I believe we Americans have the capability to wean ourselves from our dependency on foreign imports, this will take not only a considerable amount of time, but also a radical change in the mindset of U.S. consumers as well as a re-arranging of our financial reality, something that we as Americans are very familiar with of late. We would have to bear the additional costs of products produced in the U.S., where even minimum wage, in many instances, far exceeds the daily wage paid to foreign workers. While we would survive, life would most certainly change.

While there is no indication that U.S. domestic policy will shift to that of an isolationist state anytime soon, there are conditions where, in the short-term, one or more of our major ports could be shut down for some extended period of time by a maritime incident thereby "isolating" certain areas of the U.S.

Over the recent past, there are two significant incidents that come to mind that impacted the ability of a major port facility to operate. One was the loss of the supply vessel *Lee III* at the mouth of the Mississippi River in 2004 that shut down the Mississippi River and therefore access to New Orleans. The other was Hurricanes Katrina/Rita that severely damaged not only New Orleans and the surrounding area but also significant portions of Alabama and Texas.

For quite some time, the U.S. government, through different committee and evaluation groups, has been studying the affect on U.S. commerce in the event of a significant port closure. Recently, the Marine Board, in conjunction with the U.S. Navy Supervisor of Salvage and Diving, conducted a workshop in Newport Beach, California to study the impact of a terrorist event in the Port of LA/Long Beach. It is interesting to note that the U.S. salvage community not only participated in this workshop but also had a part in the design and implementation of the scenario. The scenario involved the coordinated sinking of a number of vessels within the port facility that resulted in damage to the infrastructure of the port and also impeded access to the pier facilities used to accept various commodities from the vessels.

While we all hope this scenario is not probable, the terrible events of 9-11 loom large in our minds and what we

thought was unthinkable now falls within the realm of the possible. With the continued growth and sophistication of terrorist threats along with weather concerns and day-to-day navigational errors, we must continue to strive for a safer America through increased vigilance, evaluation and pre-planning between the public and private sectors to better respond and mitigate any damage.

The U.S. salvage community has played and will continue to play an essential part in the recovery effort of any water related casualty impacting our ports and/or waterways.

It is fair to say that when the need arises and a U.S. Port or waterway is threatened, the U.S. salvage community and more specifically, ASA salvors will be there to promptly and efficiently respond to the problem and keep commerce moving. Without this homegrown response capability, a weather, accident or terrorist related event which impacts access to our nation's ports or waterways could catastrophically affect our nation. Without a strong and effective U.S. salvage capability, the prospects of a strong U.S. are minimized.

We must continue to remain diligent in our presentation while hoping for the best.

We of the American Salvage Association and U.S. salvage community are ready for the challenge. **ML**

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