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SUNKEN WRECKS: Stopping Oil Spills Before They Happen

DAVE WESTERHOLM, Director, NOAA Office of Response and Restoration
ANTHONY LLOYD, Chief, USCG Office of Incident Management & Preparedness

Awareness of the threat of oil spills from submerged wrecks has been building for a number of years. Many people know the *USS Arizona* continues to leak bunker fuel nearly 70 years after its tragic sinking in Pearl Harbor. Most aren't aware, however, that thousands of sunken wrecks silently sit in the coastal waters of the U.S. Many wrecks are substantially intact and are believed to contain sizeable amounts of petroleum, both as cargo and in the form of ship bunkers. As these vessels age and deteriorate, the risk of spills is expected to increase, creating a pervasive problem in need of further action. Proactive mitigation of this threat will doubtless be less costly than responding after a release occurs.

Some Recent Cases

In 2003, the U.S. Navy mounted a major response to the *USS Mississinawa*, sunk in Yap in 1944. In 1999, the U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) responded to spills from the wreckage of nine long liners left by a hurricane in American Samoa a decade earlier. In 2002, the USCG and NOAA responded to the wreck of the *Jacob Luckenbach* sunk in a collision off San Francisco

in 1954. The *Luckenbach* was the source of repeated mystery spills.

In response to these incidents, NOAA began to develop a national database of shipwrecks including those that pose a substantial pollution threat. Currently the database has thousands of targets and records are still being added. The Marine Technology Society published a special proceedings in 2004 focusing on such underwater pollution threats and the 2005 International Oil Spill Conference furthered the discussion within government agencies and the response and salvage industry.

It is clear from recent spills that reactive response is expensive, inefficient, and time consuming. Wreck remediation is also expensive but arguably much more cost-effective than responding to spilled oil. For example, Washington State recently completed the response to the wreck

of the *S.S. CATALA* which ran aground in 1965, but was only recently cleaned of over 34,000 gallons of fuel at a cost of approximately \$6.5 million. In contrast, the response costs and claims stemming from the *COSCO BUSAN* spill may well exceed \$100 million. More importantly, the *CATALA* oil was recovered before it could leak and contaminate an adjacent state park.

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DAVE WESTERHOLM



CAPT ANTHONY
LLOYD

THIS ISSUE IS SPONSORED BY:



Dawn Services, L.L.C.
www.dawnoffshore.com

Soundings

Soundings is published by the American Salvage Association to deliver the latest news on the marine salvage industry.

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Challenges

At least five fundamental prerequisites must be met before moving forward with wreck oil removal operations: 1) assessing and prioritizing the wrecks 2) establishing an effective response organization 3) developing and implementing appropriate technical solutions 4) complying with all environmental requirements, including those associated with preservation of historical artifacts, and 5) funding the operation.

We are working to fill in the gaps in the existing shipwreck database and are developing preliminary screening and risk assessment criteria. This effort will ensure that high priority vessels are targeted for further consideration.

The organizational challenge is in large part taken care of by the longstanding, and extremely effective, National Response System found in the National Oil and Hazardous Substances Pollution Contingency Plan. This system is fully capable of handling a wide range of spills and incidents and provides the tools to ensure that a complex interagency/private sector response can effectively and efficiently address a spill or a threat of a spill, such as may be presented by a submerged wreck.

The technological complexities of attempting lengthy, industrial style work underwater will require a vastly different collection of experts, equipment, and operational plans than those commonly used for oil spill response. Research and development will be necessary. Better techniques to assess, track and remove oil, developed in a non-crisis situation, would also be invaluable should a “PRESTIGE” type incident occur in our waters. In that 2002 incident off Spain, nearly 13,000 tons of heavy oil was removed at a depth of over 11,000 feet.

Many of the known wrecks are considered submerged cultural resources that warrant protection under the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA). If a vessel is determined to be historic, the lead agency must

consider preservation and mitigation alternatives to minimize impact, preserve the historic record and protect the site from unauthorized exploration. In some cases, state requirements for historic preservation may also need to be met.

Finally, funding for wreck remediation must be identified before the work can proceed. Most of these wrecks lack a viable responsible party to cover response costs. In some cases existing mandates in the Oil Pollution Act of 1990 (OPA) will apply.

Under OPA, Federal On-scene Coordinators (FOSCs) have the authority to access the Oil Spill Liability Trust Fund for both spills and substantial threats of spills.

Just as a grounded tanker triggers a proactive response to prevent spillage, a sunken wreck can present a substantial threat of a release without actively leaking.

Moving Forward

Most wrecks are thought to represent relatively minor threats, but a small number of wrecks are believed to contain hundreds of thousands to millions of gallons of oil. These targets need to be prioritized based on a number of factors including wreck condition, location, historical and cultural issues, and environmental sensitivity. Feasibility of oil removal is another factor and in some cases the best alternative may not be removal, but to monitor and plan for the inevitable spill. Selecting vessels for proactive response will be accomplished by objective analysis of existing information followed by more detailed assessments including field surveys of the wrecks.

Clearly, from the challenges listed above, the ability of this program to stop spills before they happen will depend on successful partnerships. NOAA and the USCG are continuing their partnership started in 1999 to identify, assess, and prioritize wrecks that pose a substantial threat of a release. An important role of the response and salvage communities will be to help define and expand the limits of safe and effective recovery technology. 🌊



President's Message

BY JOHN A. WITTE, JR.
President, American Salvage Association

As part of my role as President of the American Salvage Association, in the spring of this year I addressed a seminar in Washington, DC, on Capitol Hill in support of National Maritime Day. The focus of the seminar and my talk was



JOHN A. WITTE, JR.

environmental preparedness and the role of the professional salvor. As the ASA membership is acutely aware, salvors play an essential role in the prevention of pollution in a casualty situation by removing the source of pollution, the vessel itself. There is no question that the best way to prevent pollution is to keep the potential pollutant in the ship. That is what a salvor does.

Salvors are quite familiar with oil spill response due to the fact that we are typically, but not always, called to the scene within hours of the event where our actions normally result in minimizing or eliminating the escape of pollutants from the casualty. Therefore our work is typically reactive rather than proactive in nature. This being said, the ASA has become part of a group of dedicated marine professionals from both the public and private sectors who have begun to evaluate the possibility of responding to wrecks that have sunk decades ago but still retain the pollutants which they carried when they met their ultimate demise. While we all sometimes live in the world of "if I can't see it, it can't hurt me," the fact remains that these maritime time bombs will not go away on their own. It will take a concerted effort by all marine stakeholders, both public and private, to move this important initiative forward. We continue to work toward a solution but there are no guarantees. To avert the certainty of these vessels releasing their pollutants into the sensitive adjacent coasts, we need to act now. Today, marine environmental protection is not just a watch phrase, but a guiding principle that all marine based companies and organizations should live by or run the risk of passing a failing ecosystem to our children.

This proposed pilot project is outlined by Dave Westerholm, Director, NOAA Office of Response and Restoration, and CAPT Anthony Lloyd, Chief, USCG Office of Incident Management & Preparedness in this edition's feature story (*page 1*).

I am proud to say that the ASA is at the forefront of the collective efforts to identify and respond to the environmental pollution threats contained in these wrecked vessels and the risks they pose to the United States and its coastal waterways, beaches and wildlife. Continued degradation of the wrecks' hulls will ultimately cause fuel tanks, hulls and containers to fail, allowing pollutants to escape into the marine environment. It is clear that the cost to the public of removing the oil from the wreckage now, while it is still contained, is significantly less than the costs incurred if the oil is allowed to escape into the sensitive marine environment with the attendant impact to natural resources and sea life, as well as the significant economic losses suffered by seaside communities as a result of beach closings and related consequences. We must find a way to move this program forward. For the good of our world as a whole, there is no better time than now.

ASA and Spill Control Association of America Become Affiliates

ASA and the Spill Control Association of America (SCAA) have become Affiliate Members of each respective organization.


The Spill Control Association of America was organized in 1973 to actively promote the interests of all groups within the spill response community. The organization represents spill response contractors, manufacturers, distributors, consultants, instructors, government & training institutions and corporations working in the industry.



"The affiliate partnership agreement with the Spill Control Association of America is very positive for the American Salvage Association," said ASA President John A. Witte, Jr. "ASA's members,

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while active in marine salvage, are very involved in oil spill response as well and this relationship will be beneficial to both associations now and long into the future,” he continued.

Visit SCAA at www.scaa-spill.org 

From the Editor

BY DEBRA COLBERT
Managing Editor - *Soundings*

The summer has come and gone and businesses everywhere are buckling down for another round of work through the end of 2008. Two-thousand nine will bring a great deal of change for this nation as well, as we witness the changing of the Presidency.




DEBRA COLBERT

Change and progress continue to come to the American Salvage Association. We have been very busy over the last months and are preparing for exciting things ahead. You can read about many of the activities in this issue of *Soundings*, including the feature article, as well as the President’s Message, on an exciting potential Wreck Oil Removal Demonstration Project; National Maritime Day events on Capitol Hill held back in May, important and useful changes to our web site for marine salvors and others, and new Affiliate member relationships with the National Association of Marine Surveyors (NAMSGlobal), the Offshore Marine Service Association, (OMSA), and the Spill Control Association of America (SCAA) of which we are proud. Dawn Services LLC is our sponsor for this issue and their spotlight article profiles this important corporate associate member company located in Gretna, Louisiana.

And most exciting for the members of ASA is this month’s cover story of the well-respected trade magazine, *Maritime Executive*, which features the leaders of the association. John Witte, Jr, President; Mauricio Garrido, Vice President; Tim Beaver, Secretary/Treasurer and George Wittich, Immediate Past President, appear

on the front cover and inside pages of the magazine and discuss how ASA got started, how it has evolved over the years, and where its future lies. We are all really excited about this recognition and we urge you to pick up a copy and “read all about it!”

Our next issue of *Soundings* will be published in Winter 2009. As always, we welcome your letters to the editor, your submissions for review and your suggestions for future articles.

Thanks for reading! 

ASA and OMSA Establish Affiliate Membership

ASA and the Offshore Marine Service Association (OMSA) have agreed to establish a reciprocal Affiliate Membership relationship.



The Offshore Marine Service Association represents more than 250 member companies, including about 100 firms that own and operate marine service vessels. These vessels, some 1,200 in number, connect America with its offshore energy resources, providing every pipe, wrench, computer, barrel of fuel, and gallon of drinking water to rigs and platforms, as well as transporting tens of thousands of workers to and from the facilities. This critical flow of supplies keeps the heart of America’s energy industry pumping around the clock.

ASA has partnership agreements with the U.S. Coast Guard (Quality Partnership Agreement), and affiliate relationships with the International Salvage Union, the North American Marine Environment Protection Association, (NAMEPA) the National Association of Marine Surveyors (NAMSGlobal), the Association of Diving Contractors – International (ADC), and the Spill Control Association of America (SCAA).

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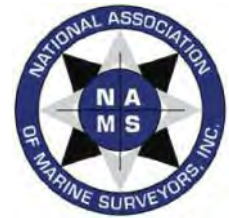
“The partnership relationship with OMSA is another important step forward for the American Salvage Association,” said ASA President John A. Witte, Jr. “OMSA plays a critical role in supporting the offshore marine service industry, and the professional salvage industry supports the offshore industry, so ours is a natural relationship,” he continued.

Visit OMSA at www.offshoremarine.org

routinely investigate marine claims and act as expert trial witnesses.

“We are very pleased to partner with NAMSGlobal,” said ASA President John A. Witte, Jr. “The American Salvage Association’s members rely on professional marine surveyors and the NAMSGlobal role is essential in their certification,” he continued.

Visit NAMSGlobal at www.namsglobal.org



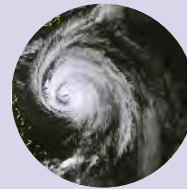
NAMSGlobal Joins ASA As Affiliate

NAMSGlobal (The National Association of Marine Surveyors - NAMS) and ASA have established an Affiliate Membership relationship.

NAMSGlobal is a professional non-profit organization that certifies marine surveyors and provides continuing education opportunities. NAMSGlobal membership is international and, once certified, its members carry the NAMS-Certified Marine Surveyor (NAMS-CMS) designation after their names. From recreational boats to commercial ships, NAMSGlobal members survey new and used vessels to determine condition and value. NAMSGlobal members also survey cargo, machinery, docks, wharfs, marinas, and equipment related to the marine industry. The association’s members also

ASA Members Respond to Ike

A number of ASA members were called to the Gulf region to offer salvage and response services to help clean up the aftermath of Hurricane Ike. Ike walloped Galveston, and Houston, Texas in the early morning hours of September 4. The most intense storm so far in the 2008 Atlantic hurricane season, according to news sources, at one point the diameter of Ike’s tropical storm and hurricane force winds were 450 and 190 miles, respectively. Damages from Ike in U.S. coastal areas are estimated at \$27 billion.



Spotlight on Dawn Services, L.L.C.

Dawn Services, L.L.C. is a family owned and operated business founded in 1982. For over 20 years, Dawn Services has been a leader in the marine transportation industry.

Dawn Services, L.L.C. offers a variety of services and is diverse in its capabilities. The fleet consists of seven tugboats, a deck barge and a quarters barge. Dawn Services specializes in marine transportation including but not limited to: tugboats, crew boats, utility boats, supply boats, dive boats, deck barges, quarters barges and tank barges. In addition, Dawn Services provides services in salvage support, offshore construction, project cargo and dredging support.

Dawn Services, L.L.C. is certified in the Responsible Carrier Program by the American Waterways Operators and is a proud member of the American Salvage Association.



UPCOMING EVENTS



October 28
 ASA Fall Meeting
 Houston, TX
www.americansalvage.org

October 28-30
 Clean Gulf
 San Antonio, TX
www.cleangulf.org

ASA Participates in National Maritime Day



ASA President John Witte, Jr. talks with RADM Brian Salerno, Assistant Commandant for Plans & Policy for the U.S. Coast Guard, at a panel discussion of “The Environmental Imperative: Accelerating Solutions,” a seminar for government and industry participants in conjunction with National Maritime Day 2008 on May 21, 2008 on Capitol Hill. Sponsors of the event were North American Marine Environment Protection Association (NAMEPA), North American Maritime Ministry Association (NAMMA), and ASA.



Carleen Lyden-Kluss, Executive Director of the North American Marine Environment Protection Association (NAMEPA) – standing with Rep. Elijah E. Cummings – led efforts to organize the 2008 National Maritime Day Seminar on Capitol Hill.



Panelists at the National Maritime Day event listen to remarks from Rep. Elijah E. Cummings, Chairman, Subcommittee on Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation. From left to right: Clay Maitland, Founding Chairman, NAMEPA; Rep. Cummings; VADM Vivien S. Crea, Vice Commandant, USCG; Greg Binion, Kirby Corporation; and John A. Witte, Jr., ASA.

Meet the ASA Membership

For membership information, please contact Brad Rosello, Chairman, ASA Membership Committee via email at bradleyengineering@yahoo.com, or Dick Fredricks, ASA Director, via email at rfredricks@vesselalliance.com.

Corporate Associate Members



ABS Marine Casualty Response, Inc.
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www.eagle.org



Marine Response Consultants
Coinjock, NC USA
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Phil Risko
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McCord**

RADM Robert C. North,
U.S. Coast Guard (Ret.)

CAPT "Bert" Marsh,
USN (Ret.)

CAPT Jim Wilkins,
USN (Ret.)

CAPT Richard Hooper,
USN

Mark Your Calendar: Attend ASA's 2008 Fall Meeting in October

Plan to attend ASA's Fall Board of Directors meeting on Tuesday, October 28 (The Executive Committee will meet the evening of October 27) at The Woodlands Resort and Conference Center in The Woodlands, Texas, just north of Houston. The luncheon speakers will be Admiral James Card, USCG (ret.) who will address his recent report to the Commandant on USCG challenges, and Jeff Lantz, Director National and International Standards for the USCG. ☺



Improvements to ASA Web Site Now Complete

The Standard Contract Forms section of the ASA website, www.americansalvage.org, which had been a work in progress, is now complete! Please take a few minutes to explore this site, that lists salvage contracting forms available for downloading on:

Lloyd's Standard Form of Salvage Agreement: No Cure - No Pay; Lloyd's Standard Form of Salvage Agreement: Standard Salvage and Arbitration Clauses; Lloyd's Standard Form of Salvage Agreement: Procedural Rules; Lloyd's Standard Form of Salvage Agreement: Fixed Cost Arbitration Procedure on Documents Alone; Schedule of Fixed Costs; SCOPIC Clause; SCOPIC Appendix A, Appendix B, and Appendix C; SCOPIC Code of Practice Between International Salvage Union and International Group of P&I Clubs; Salvhire 2005; Salvhire Notes; Salvcon 2005; Salvcon Notes; Towcorn; Towhire; Wreckfixed 99; Wreckhire 99; and Wreckstage 99. ☺



Meet the ASA Membership

General Members



American Marine Corporation
Honolulu, HI USA
Tel: (808) 545-5190 (24 Hours)
www.amarinecorp.com



Magone Marine
Dutch Harbor, AK USA
Tel: (907) 581-1400 (24 Hours)
www.magonemarine.com



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Ocean Group Inc.
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www.groupeocean.com



T&T Marine Salvage, Inc.
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Donjon Marine Co., Inc.
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Resolve Marine Group
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Weeks Marine, Inc.
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www.weeksmarine.com



Global Diving & Salvage, Inc.
Seattle, WA USA
Tel: (206) 623-0621 (24 Hours)
www.gdiving.com

For membership information, please contact Brad Rosello, Chairman, ASA Membership Committee via email at bradleyengineering@yahoo.com, or Dick Fredricks, ASA Director, via email at rfredricks@vesselalliance.com.