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AWO Hails New Deadlines in Coast Guard Authorization Bill to Release Historic Towing Vessel Inspection Regulation

Arlington, VA – The American Waterways Operators (AWO), the national trade association for the tugboat, towboat and barge industry, hails the enactment of provisions in the Coast Guard Authorization Act of 2010 (P.L. 111-281) that bring the industry one step closer to a historic towing vessel inspection regulation to improve safety in the towing industry. Section 701 of the Act requires the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) “to issue a notice of proposed rulemaking regarding inspection requirements for towing vessels” no more than 90 days from the date of enactment, a provision strongly advocated by AWO. The law requires that a final rule be issued no more than one year after the enactment date. A draft notice of proposed rulemaking (NPRM) has been stalled in the Administration clearance process at DHS since February 2009, even though its publication has been urgently requested by the industry and Congress.

Both U.S. House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee Chairman James Oberstar (D-MN) and Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation Subcommittee Chairman Elijah Cummings (D-MD) have sent letters to DHS Secretary Janet Napolitano urging prompt publication of the NPRM. AWO has requested immediate publication of the proposed rule in meetings with DHS and the Coast Guard, in testimony before the House Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation Subcommittee, and in letters to the editor of *The Washington Post* and the *New Orleans Times-Picayune*.

Among other things, the proposed rule is expected to require all towing companies to implement a safety management system (SMS), one of the National Transportation Safety Board’s top ten most wanted transportation safety improvements.

AWO President & CEO Thomas Allegretti said, “AWO has been working through the congressionally authorized Towing Safety Advisory Commission for years to help the Coast Guard develop this historic regulation. We are gratified that this action will finally move this important rulemaking process to its conclusion and thereby enhance safety in the towing industry and on our nation’s waterways. As the *Deepwater Horizon* spill tragically illustrated, it is harder to clean up a mess than to prevent it in the first place.”

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