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## **Historic New Towing Vessel Inspection Program Hailed by Vessel Operators as Enhancing Safety**

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- The U.S. Coast Guard has released a notice of proposed rulemaking that would establish a historic new inspection program for towing vessels, including a requirement for a safety management system, as recommended by the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB). The American Waterways Operators (AWO) hails this historic action as it will increase safety, security and environmental stewardship throughout the tugboat, towboat and barge industry.

In 2003, AWO took the unprecedented step of requesting that the Commandant of the Coast Guard ask Congress for the authority to establish a new inspection regime unique to towing vessels. This authority was granted in the Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation Act of 2004. AWO President & CEO Thomas Allegretti observed, "The member companies of AWO have a well-deserved reputation as safety leaders and have spent years working to effect this change in order to raise the bar of safety for the entire industry. AWO looks forward to working with the Coast Guard to perfect and successfully implement this new safety program."

Since 2004, AWO has worked closely with the Coast Guard through the congressionally established Towing Safety Advisory Committee (TSAC) to craft a 21<sup>st</sup> century approach to towing vessel inspection, one that focuses on the principal cause of towing vessel casualties: human error. AWO members have a long history of safety leadership, demonstrated through the AWO Responsible Carrier Program (RCP), a safety and environmental protection program with which all AWO members must be in audited compliance as a condition of membership.

Since the adoption of the AWO RCP in 1994, the tugboat, towboat and barge industry has made great strides in enhancing safety, achieving significant reductions in crew fatalities, oil spills and vessel casualties, including a record low crew fatalities and oil spills in 2010, the last year for which complete statistics are available. However, AWO believes that industry safety performance will benefit even further from the establishment of a Coast Guard inspection program, including a requirement that all towing vessels implement a safety management system. In September 2000, as part of the *m/v Anne Holly* accident investigation, the NTSB recommended that the Coast Guard require all domestic towing companies to develop and implement a safety management system.

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While this new inspection program is a historic change, it is also an outgrowth of years of cooperative work by AWO and the Coast Guard to improve maritime safety and environmental protection, including the innovative Towing Vessel Bridging Program, under which more than 3000 towing vessels have already undergone voluntary Coast Guard examinations to verify their compliance with safety and environmental stewardship requirements. Through the Coast Guard-AWO Safety Partnership, established in 1995, government and industry have worked together to tackle the most pressing safety problems in the towing industry.

Some of the features of the Coast Guard proposed regulations include:

- Establishing comprehensive new standards to ensure the safety of all aspects of towing vessel operations, from vessel equipment to human factors.
- Requiring towing companies to implement a safety management system, as recommended by the NTSB. Companies that choose not to implement an SMS would undergo annual Coast Guard inspections of their towing vessels.
- Using Coast Guard-approved third parties to verify compliance with the new requirements, enabling the Coast Guard to better target its resources on those companies and vessels whose operations warrant closer scrutiny.

This is a complex rulemaking and AWO will participate actively in the regulatory process, providing detailed and specific comments to refine the proposed regulations and ensure that they achieve their promise: helping to make the industry safer as it reliably carries the nation's cargo, thus benefiting America's economy, environment and quality of life.

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