Industry Groups, Key Stakeholders Urge Government to Prevent Mississippi River Closure

MO, IL Governors Ask Corps to Take Emergency Action

At a November 16 joint press conference with representatives from the barge industry and officials from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and U.S. Coast Guard, industry spokespersons Craig Philip, Chief Executive Officer, Ingram Barge Company, and George Foster, President, JB Marine Service, Inc., urged Corps and Coast Guard officials to take the emergency steps necessary to address a developing situation on the Mississippi River which could effectively bring waterborne commerce to a halt along key points of the river in early December.

Currently, water releases from dams on the upper Missouri River are planned to be significantly scaled back later this month, and these reductions are expected to negatively impact Mississippi River water levels between St. Louis, MO, and Cairo, IL, beginning December 1. Of particular concern are hazardous rock formations near Thebes and Grand Tower, IL, which will threaten navigation if water levels drop below the already near historic low levels on the Mississippi. These rock formations, combined with the reduced flows from the Missouri River, could prevent maintenance of a nine-foot navigation channel by mid-December, effectively halting the transport of essential goods on the mid-Mississippi River.

While thanking Major General John Peabody, Commander of the Corps’ Mississippi Valley Division, and Rear Admiral Roy Nash, Commander of the Eighth Coast Guard District, for their partnership and hard work to address low water conditions throughout the summer and fall, Mr. Philip and Mr. Foster both highlighted the severity of the current situation on the river.

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“In all of my years on the river, I never thought I would imagine a scenario where the mighty Mississippi would shut down, and yet here we are,” said Mr. Foster.

“A closure on any part of the system will mean less traffic on the whole river, lengthy delays in shipments for both our domestic use and critical exports, and rising transportation costs that will undoubtedly reach consumers,” concluded Mr. Foster.

AWO and Waterways Council, Inc. expressed similar sentiments in a November 8 press release, reprinted on page 5. AWO and WCI are urging Congress and the president to direct the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to expedite the removal of the rock formations near Thebes and Grand Tower before the Mississippi River reaches critical low water levels in December. The groups are also calling for the release of additional water from the Missouri River reservoirs until the rock removal work is completed.

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“Congress and the Administration need to understand the immediate severity of this situation,” said Tom Allegretti, AWO President & CEO. “The Mississippi River is an economic superhighway that efficiently carries hundreds of millions of tons of essential goods for domestic use as well as national export. We need to address this situation swiftly, cut through bureaucratic red tape, and prevent the closure of the Mississippi.”

“Along with 150 million tons of agricultural products, nearly 180 million tons of coal, 150 million tons of petroleum, and all of the associated manufacturing jobs those and many other commodities support, the effects of stopping commerce on the Mississippi River will be felt harshly across the country,” said Michael J. Toohey, President & CEO of WCI. “We need to find a way to keep commerce moving, and I am confident the government can do so without having a significant impact on the many other beneficiaries of our inland waterways system whose need for water we recognize.”

Additionally, Missouri Governor Jay Nixon sent a letter on November 9 to Assistant Secretary of the Army Jo-Ellen Darcy urging the Corps to continue providing water flow from the Missouri River to the Mississippi River. On November 14, Illinois Governor Pat Quinn sent a similarly urgent letter to Secretary Darcy.

“The 2012 drought has caused a significant impact on water levels on the Missouri and Mississippi rivers. With the continuing and projected lack of adequate precipitation, additional barge traffic restrictions on—or even closure of—the Mississippi River channel become imminent possibilities,” Gov. Nixon’s letter stated. “I urge the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to avert potential economic disaster on this vital avenue American farmers use to get their goods into the world market.”

“I am writing to urge your cooperation with the States of Illinois and Missouri to ensure every effort is made to maximize commerce on our rivers, and to promote the export of American goods across the world market,” Gov. Quinn stated in his letter. “Experts at the Illinois Departments of Agriculture, Commerce, Natural Resources and Transportation stand ready to work with you to fast-track dredging and clearing of rock pinnacles along the river.”

For more information on this issue, please contact Ann McCulloch at (703) 841-9300, extension 252, or amcculloch@vesselalliance.com.

Coast Guard Releases Policy Guidance on Issuance of STCW Endorsements to Facilitate Compliance with Canadian Regulations

On November 2, the National Maritime Center, the credentialing body of the U.S. Coast Guard, released policy guidance on its plan for issuing STCW endorsements to mariners serving aboard vessels impacted by the October 26 announcement that vessels calling at Canadian ports must be in compliance with Canadian marine personnel regulations by October 2013 (MSIB 021-12). As reported in the November 5 AWO Letter, the Canadian regulations require U.S. vessels operating in Canadian waters en route to a port or place in Canada to carry two licensed engineers if standing a two-watch system. The requirements apply to vessels with a propulsive power of 750 kW (1,000 hp) or more and do not apply to U.S. vessels transiting Canadian waters without calling at a port or place in Canada.

In order the facilitate U.S. compliance, the NMC will now issue STCW endorsements to qualifying Designated Duty Engineers (DDE) as a Chief Engineer. A DDE endorsement authorizes service as Chief or Assistant Engineer on vessels not more than 500 gross tons subject to the following limitations: 1) for vessels of not more than 4,000 horsepower, only on near coastal, Great Lakes or inland waters; and 2) a DDE with no horsepower limitations may serve on any waters.

The November 2 guidance does not, however, identify a process by which currently unlicensed engineers can receive credit for past experience toward obtaining a DDE endorsement. AWO is working with the Coast Guard to identify such a pathway and will keep members advised as this issue develops.

To read the NMC’s announcement, click here. For more information, please contact Jennifer Carpenter or Brian Vahey at (703) 841-9300, extensions 260 and 251, respectively, or at jcarpenter@vesselalliance.com or bvahey@vesselalliance.com.
South Korea Proposes Additional Training for Towing Vessel Personnel under STCW

At the July 2012 meeting of the International Maritime Organization’s Subcommittee on Standards of Training and Watchkeeping, the Republic of Korea proposed additional training for towing vessel personnel under part B of the STCW Code. South Korea has proposed that taking this step will improve the capability of mariners and reduce the number of incidents involving towing vessels that occur internationally.

In its proposal, South Korea recommends that beyond the basic requirements for personnel qualification in the STCW Convention, training for personnel on towing vessels should also encompass: towing, type of loaded cargo, loading/unloading, basic environmental protection procedures, navigational environment, control and maintenance of towing/safety equipment, human resource management and tug-barge operation.

The U.S. Coast Guard has clarified that the majority of these elements are already included in the STCW Code for officers in charge of a navigational watch and for masters on ships of less than 500 GT engaged on near-coastal voyages. However, training for towing, control and maintenance of towing/safety equipment and tug-barge operation are not explicitly captured in the Code and would need to be added. South Korea has proposed that any additional guidance on training and qualifications of personnel on towing vessels should be included in section B of the STCW Code. This section of the Code is non-mandatory.

The Coast Guard has asked to work with AWO to develop a response at the next STW subcommittee meeting in May 2013. AWO welcomes member feedback on this issue.

For more information, please click here to read South Korea’s proposal, or contact Brian Vahey at (703) 841-9300, extension 251, or bvahey@vesselalliance.com.

Post-Sandy Jones Act Waiver Expires

The limited blanket waiver of the Jones Act issued by the Department of Homeland Security in the aftermath of Hurricane Sandy expired as scheduled on November 13. As reported in the November 5 AWO Letter, the waiver permitted non-coastwise qualified vessels to move petroleum and feedstocks such as ethanol from the Gulf Coast to the Northeast, provided the product was loaded by November 13 and offloaded by November 20. On November 14, the Maritime Administration published a list of 12 foreign-flag vessels that made use of the waiver.

For more information, please contact Tom Allegretti or Jennifer Carpenter at (703) 841-9300, extensions 250 and 260, respectively, or tallegretti@vesselalliance.com or jcarpenter@vesselalliance.com.

NTSB To Hold Conference on GIS Mapping in Transportation Safety

On December 4-5, the National Transportation Safety Board will hold a conference at its headquarters in Washington, DC, to explore the use of Geographic Information Systems (GIS) in analyzing and preventing transportation accidents. The NTSB meeting will bring stakeholders, researchers and practitioners together to discuss how GIS data, technologies and techniques can be applied across all transportation modes to improve safety.

There is no charge to attend the conference, but registration is required. Organizations may also bring small exhibits (posters, pop-up displays) to the conference. For more information on the event, please click here, or contact Ivan Cheung with the NTSB at (202) 314-6579 or ivan.cheung@ntsb.gov.
A R L I N G T O N , V A – The American Waterways Operators (AWO) and Waterways Council Inc. (WCI), are calling upon Congress and the Administration to address a developing situation on the Mississippi River which could effectively bring commerce on the Mighty Mississippi to a halt in early December.

Water releases from dams on the upper Missouri River are planned to be significantly scaled back later this month and these reductions are expected to negatively impact the Mississippi River water level between St. Louis and Cairo, IL beginning December 1. Of particular concern are hazardous rock formations near Thebes and Grand Tower, IL, which threaten navigation when water levels drop to anticipated, near historic lows. The rock formations, combined with the reduced flows from the Missouri River, will prohibit the transport of essential goods along this critical point in the river, effectively stopping barge transportation on the middle Mississippi River around December 10.

“Congress and the Administration need to understand the immediate severity of this situation,” said Tom Allegretti, AWO’s President & CEO. “The Mississippi River is an economic superhighway that efficiently carries hundreds of millions of tons of essential goods for domestic use as well as national export. We need to address this situation swiftly, cut through bureaucratic red tape, and prevent the closure of the Mississippi.”

AWO and WCI are urging Congress and the President to direct the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to expedite the removal of the rock formations near Thebes and Grand Tower before the Mississippi River reaches critical low water levels in December. The groups stated that additional measures should also be explored to preserve water levels that support navigation on the Mississippi through the winter months.

“Along with 150 million tons of agricultural products, nearly 180 million tons of coal, 150 million tons of petroleum, and all of the associated manufacturing jobs those and many other commodities support, the effects of stopping commerce on the Mississippi River will be felt harshly across the country,” said Michael J. Tohey, President & CEO of WCI. “We need to find a way to keep commerce moving, and I am confident the government can do so without having a significant impact on the many other beneficiaries of our inland waterways system whose need for water we recognize,” he continued.

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AWO Continues to Monitor Sandy Recovery

Many AWO member companies are still returning to normal business operations in the wake of Hurricane Sandy, and many have contributed to the efforts to help the Northeast region recover. Especially as many affected maritime industry employees are still living with the day-to-day challenges imposed by the hurricane on their families, AWO asks that the industry continue to keep all those affected by the hurricane in our collective thoughts in the days and weeks ahead.

AMP to Present on Jones Act at WorkBoat Show

Are you attending the 2012 International WorkBoat Show? Don’t miss a special presentation on the Jones Act given by the American Maritime Partnership. The event will take place on Thursday, December 6, from 2:00-3:00 p.m. at the New Orleans Downtown Marriott at the Convention Center. To RSVP, or for more information, please contact Ashley Smith with the Offshore Marine Service Association at (504) 528-9411 or ashley@offshoremarine.org.

Atlantic Region

Industry Members Participate in Annual Towing Vessel Safety Seminar

On November 8, mariners from several AWO member companies, including Allied Transportation Company/Kirby Offshore Marine LLC, McAllister Towing, Moran Towing Corporation, Norfolk Tug Company and The Vane Brothers Company, participated in the fourteenth annual Towing Vessel Safety Seminar sponsored by the U.S. Coast Guard and the Virginia Maritime Association. The event was held at the Coast Guard base in Portsmouth, VA.

“The day was a huge success. I do not know of any other collaborative effort in the country that strives to bring mariners and the Coast Guard into such a forum,” said Jeff Parker, Vice President, Operations, Allied Transportation Company/Kirby Offshore Marine LLC.

The event brought more than 140 professional mariners from the Hampton Roads maritime community together for courses on merchant mariner documentation and licensing requirements, cold water survival training, damage control training and oil spill response. The day also included Tugboat Olympics, a competition in which mariners demonstrate their skill in line throwing, knot tying and other nautical tasks.

Important Dates and Reminders

For more information, please contact Sarah Young at (703) 841-9300, extension 291, unless otherwise noted.

January 22-23: Joint Safety Committees Meeting, The Westin New Orleans Canal Place, New Orleans, LA


For more information about the event, or to inquire about participating next year, please contact Jennifer Parham at (757) 628-2663 or events@portofhamptonroads.com.