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FINAL

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

U. S. COAST GUARD

STATEMENT OF CAPTAIN WILLIAM J. LOEFSTEDT

ON ENVIRONMENTAL HAZARDS ASSOCIATED WITH ABANDONED BARGES

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

COMMITTEE ON MERCHANT MARINE AND FISHERIES

SUBCOMMITTEE ON COAST GUARD AND NAVIGATION

29 APRIL 1991

CAPTAIN WILLIAM J. LOEFSTEDT, USCG

COMMANDING OFFICER, MARINE SAFETY OFFICE NEW ORLEANS

Captain Loefstedt has served as Commanding Officer of Coast Guard Marine Safety Office New Orleans since June of 1989. Prior to this assignment, he served as Commanding Officer of Marine Safety Office Mobile, Alabama, and as Chief of the Merchant Vessel Personnel Division at Coast Guard Headquarters in Washington, D.C. Captain Loefstedt is a 1963 graduate of New York State Maritime College at Fort Schuyler, Bronx, New York, where he earned a Bachelor's degree in Marine Transportation. He has served a distinguished career that includes sea service aboard the Coast Guard cutters Matagorda and Bering Sea. His shore assignments include the Marine Safety Offices in Seattle and New York, and the Marine Safety Offices in San Francisco and Memphis, where he served as Commanding Officer. He also served in the Merchant Marine Industry Training program with Pacific Far East Lines in San Francisco, and in the Fifth Coast Guard District as Chief of the Commercial Vessel Safety Branch and Fifth District Civil Penalties Hearing Officer. During the energy crisis of 1973-74, he was assigned for eight months to the Federal Energy Office, San Francisco, where he served as the Director of Operations for the Ninth Federal Region. In 1979, he earned a Masters degree in Public Administration from George Washington University in Washington, D.C.

Captain Loefstedt and his wife, the former Margaret R. Hoffman, are natives of New York City. Their son, Robert, is a Lieutenant Junior Grade in the Navy aboard the USS Shreveport (LPD-12). Their son, Brian, is in his final year at Auburn, and daughter Christine is currently a sophomore at Northwestern State University in Natchitoches, Louisiana.

Captain Loefstedt's awards include two Coast Guard Commendation Medals; the Coast Guard Meritorious Unit Commendation; the National Defense Medal; the Vietnam Campaign Ribbon with two stars; the Sea Service Ribbon; the Vietnamese Service Medal; and Rifle Marksman and Pistol Sharpshooter ribbons. In addition, he received a Certificate of Merit from the Federal Energy Administrator for his service with that agency.

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ON ABANDONED BARGES  
BEFORE THE  
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GOOD MORNING, MR. CHAIRMAN AND DISTINGUISHED MEMBERS OF THE SUBCOMMITTEE. I AM CAPTAIN BILL LOEFSTEDT, CAPTAIN OF THE PORT OF NEW ORLEANS. THANK YOU FOR THE OPPORTUNITY TO ADDRESS YOU TODAY ABOUT THE PROBLEM OF ABANDONED BARGES IN SOUTHERN LOUISIANA.

AS THE CAPTAIN OF THE PORT IN THE NEW ORLEANS ZONE, I AM ALSO THE PREDESIGNATED FEDERAL ON-SCENE COORDINATOR (FOSC) IN THE COASTAL ZONE. MY AREA OF FOSC RESPONSIBILITY ENCOMPASSES THE LENGTH OF THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER FROM THE GULF OF MEXICO TO THE ARKANSAS STATE LINE. IT INCLUDES A SMALL PORTION OF THE ATCHAFALAYA SPILLWAY NORTH OF KROTZ SPRINGS; AND THE COASTAL AREA BETWEEN GRAND ISLE, LOUISIANA AND LONG BEACH, MISSISSIPPI. WITHIN THIS AREA I AM RESPONSIBLE FOR ASSESSING SPILLS AND THREATS OF SPILLS, MONITORING THE CLEANUP ACTIONS OF THE SPILLER, AND INITIATING ANY FEDERAL MITIGATION AND CLEANUP ACTIVITIES WHICH MAY BE REQUIRED.

IN RECENT YEARS, MY OFFICE RESPONDED TO REPORTS OF SPILLS AT SEVERAL ABANDONED BARGE SITES WHICH RESULTED IN THE EXPENDITURE OF SUBSTANTIAL AMOUNTS OF MONEY FROM FUNDS AUTHORIZED UNDER CERCLA AND THE FEDERAL WATER POLLUTION CONTROL ACT. FOR EXAMPLE, TWO ABANDONED TANK BARGES LOCATED IN THE HARVEY CANAL NEAR NEW

ORLEANS POSE A SUBSTANTIAL THREAT TO THE MARINE ENVIRONMENT. THESE ARE VESSELS OF CONVENIENCE, SERVING AS RECEPTACLES FOR ILLEGAL DUMPING OPERATIONS. SINCE 1987, MORE THAN \$168,000 DOLLARS HAVE BEEN SPENT IN REPEATED EFFORTS TO MITIGATE THE THREAT FROM THESE BARGES. ANOTHER INCIDENT--A CERCLA FUNDED RESPONSE TO TWO TANK BARGES IN EMPIRE, LOUISIANA--RESULTED IN EXPENDITURES OF OVER \$835,000 DOLLARS.

THESE INCIDENTS, ALONG WITH THE POSSIBILITY OF PROBLEMS AT OTHER SITES, RAISED MY LEVEL OF CONCERN ABOUT THE SCOPE OF THE ABANDONED BARGE PROBLEM. IN THE FALL OF 1989 MY OFFICE INITIATED AN EXTENSIVE SURVEY EFFORT IN CONJUNCTION WITH COAST GUARD AIR STATION, NEW ORLEANS. THE PURPOSE WAS TO DETERMINE HOW MANY BARGES OR OTHER ABANDONED SITES WERE THREATENING OUR RIVERS, LAKES, BAYOUS AND MARSHES. IT WAS OUR GOAL TO QUANTIFY THE THREAT AND--ONCE HAVING DONE SO--TO DEVELOP AN ACTIVE PLAN FOR ADDRESSING THE PROBLEM. CONSIDERING THE CONDITIONS AND LOCATIONS OF SOME OF THE SITES, THE SEARCH PROJECT WAS DUBBED "OPERATION SNAKEPIT."

"OPERATION SNAKEPIT" HAS SO FAR COVERED ABOUT 40 PERCENT OF THE TARGETED AREA. COAST GUARD AIRCRAFT, INCLUDING THOSE OF THE COAST GUARD AUXILIARY, HAVE BEEN USED TO SCOUR A TWENTY THOUSAND SQUARE MILE AREA. THIS AREA WAS DIVIDED INTO A GRID OF 66 SECTORS MEASURING 18 BY 18 NAUTICAL MILES EACH. OVER A 12-MONTH PERIOD, THE PROJECT TEAM HAS LOCATED 165 POTENTIALLY ABANDONED BARGES, 276 STORAGE TANKS, AND 109 WASTE PITS. THE TANKS AND PITS APPARENTLY REMAIN FROM OIL EXPLORATION AND PRODUCTION

ACTIVITIES, AND ARE BEING REFERRED TO THE EPA AND APPROPRIATE STATE AGENCIES FOR ACTION. SINCE WE ARE PURSUING THIS EFFORT AS THE NORMAL OPERATIONAL WORKLOAD PERMITS, I DO NOT ANTICIPATE COMPLETING THIS SEARCH FOR ANOTHER YEAR OR TWO, UNLESS INITIAL FINDINGS INDICATE A MORE PRESSING NEED.

THE OPERATION HAS DETECTED SOME ACTIVELY POLLUTING SITES AND THESE HAVE BEEN IMMEDIATELY ADDRESSED BY MY POLLUTION RESPONSE PERSONNEL. AS AN EXAMPLE, ONE NOTABLE SITE ON THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER BATTURE NEAR HAHNVILLE, LOUISIANA, WAS DISCOVERED IN JULY 1990. SEVERAL BARGES AT THAT SITE, WHICH ONCE SERVED AS A BARGE-CLEANING FACILITY, WERE FOUND TO CONTAIN HEAVY PETROLEUM PRODUCTS. AS MY INVESTIGATORS MADE THEIR WAY THROUGH THE UNDERBRUSH, MORE BARGES IMBEDDED IN THE BATTURE WERE DISCOVERED-- BRINGING THE TOTAL TO SEVEN. IN THIS CASE, THE CURRENT OWNER OF THE PROPERTY AGREED TO CLEAN UP THE SITE AND REMOVE THE BARGES. THROUGH LATE 1990, THIS EFFORT WAS MONITORED BY PERSONNEL FROM MY OFFICE AND FROM THE LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY. BY THE FIRST WEEK OF THIS YEAR, IT WAS CLEAR TO ME THAT THE ACTIONS OF THE RESPONSIBLE PARTY WOULD NOT BE COMPLETED BEFORE THE SITE WAS INUNDATED BY THE RAPIDLY RISING RIVER. I PARTIALLY FEDERALIZED THE CLEANUP ON JANUARY 4, 1991, TO BUILD A CONTAINMENT BARRIER OF SHEET PILE AROUND THE BARGE WHICH POSED THE LARGEST OIL SPILL THREAT. THE FUNDING, OVER \$400,000, CAME FROM THE OIL SPILL LIABILITY TRUST FUND CREATED BY THE OIL POLLUTION ACT OF 1990. FURTHER EXPENDITURES WILL DEPEND ON THE ABILITY OF THE SITE OWNER TO CONTINUE ADEQUATE AND TIMELY CONTAINMENT, REMOVAL AND DISPOSAL.

IN OTHER CLEANUP OPERATIONS UNDERTAKEN AT FEDERAL EXPENSE, WE HAVE REMOVED SUFFICIENT AMOUNTS OF THE OIL OR HAZARDOUS WASTES TO ELIMINATE THE ENVIRONMENTAL THREAT, ONLY TO FIND THAT THE INVOLVED BARGES HAVE BEEN FILLED AGAIN BY ILLEGAL DUMPING OF OIL OR WASTE.

AS THE CATALOGING OF SITES CONTINUED, A JOINT TASK FORCE WAS FORMED, MADE UP OF PERSONNEL FROM THE COAST GUARD MARINE SAFETY OFFICE, ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY REGION SIX, EIGHTH COAST GUARD DISTRICT, COAST GUARD ATLANTIC AREA STRIKE TEAM, LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY, AND THE LOUISIANA STATE POLICE. THIS TASK FORCE FORMULATED A PLAN TO ADDRESS POSSIBLE COURSES OF ACTION, INCLUDING CONTAINMENT, TESTING, CLEANUP, REMOVAL, AND DISPOSAL OF THE POLLUTANTS. THE ULTIMATE GOAL IS TO REMOVE OR DESTROY THE BARGES AFTER THE CLEANUP IS COMPLETE.

THE ABANDONED BARGE TASK FORCE CONCURRED ON THE NEED FOR A MORE IN-DEPTH ASSESSMENT OF THE PROBLEM. IN SEPTEMBER, 1990, ALL OF THE INVOLVED ORGANIZATIONS AGREED TO CONDUCT A MULTI-PHASED OPERATION TO LOCATE ABANDONED BARGES, IDENTIFY OWNERSHIP, TEST CONTENTS OF THE BARGES, AND DEVELOP A STRATEGY FOR CLEANUP AND DISPOSAL. A RANKING SYSTEM WAS DEVELOPED, BASED UPON EACH BARGE'S VISUAL APPEARANCE; PROXIMITY TO RESIDENTIAL, BUSINESS, AND ENVIRONMENTALLY-SENSITIVE AREAS; AND ACCESSIBILITY FOR USE AS A DISPOSAL SITE. THROUGH USE OF AERIAL OBSERVATION, AN INITIAL TARGET GROUP OF NINETEEN BARGES POSING THE GREATEST RISK WAS CHOSEN FOR FURTHER EVALUATION.

IN PHASE ONE, THE SELECTED BARGES WERE VISITED BY A "GROUND-

TRUTHING" TEAM OF COAST GUARD AND EPA PERSONNEL. THE PRIMARY OBJECTIVE OF THIS VISIT WAS TO IDENTIFY THE BARGES, SEARCH FOR INFORMATION CONCERNING OWNERS OF THE BARGE, EVALUATE THE BARGE CONDITION, AND ESTIMATE THE NUMBER OF TANKS FOR SAMPLING. PHASE TWO, NOW COMPLETE, INCLUDED AN ADMINISTRATIVE RECORDS SEARCH AND INVESTIGATION TO IDENTIFY OWNERSHIP AND VALIDATE THE STATUS OF THE BARGES. THIS WAS DONE THROUGH EXTENSIVE RESEARCH, CONDUCTED BY MY DOCUMENTATION DEPARTMENT, AS WELL AS A SEARCH OF THE MARINE SAFETY INFORMATION SYSTEM (MSIS). PHASE THREE, THE SAMPLING PHASE, BEGAN IN MARCH 1991 FOR THE FIFTEEN BARGES THAT WERE CONFIRMED AS ABANDONED. THIS PHASE WAS COMPLETED AHEAD OF SCHEDULE ON APRIL 1, 1991. PRELIMINARY RESULTS FROM HAZARD CATEGORIZATION INDICATE THAT THIRTEEN OF THE FIFTEEN BARGES SAMPLED CONTAIN ONLY OILY WASTE AND WATER; HOWEVER, TWO OF THE BARGES ARE SUSPECTED TO CONTAIN AN EPA-DESIGNATED HAZARDOUS SUBSTANCE. COAST GUARD AND SAMPLE ANALYSIS COSTS TO DATE ARE ESTIMATED AT APPROXIMATELY \$55,000.

FINALLY, IN PHASE FOUR, WE WILL ATTEMPT CLEANUP AND REMOVAL OF THOSE BARGES WHICH POSE AN IMMEDIATE THREAT TO PUBLIC HEALTH OR THE ENVIRONMENT. A SPECIFIC RESPONSE PLAN WILL BE DESIGNED FOR EACH SITE. WHEN THE COMPLETE LABORATORY ANALYSIS OF THE BARGE SAMPLES ARE RECEIVED, THE TASK FORCE WILL EXAMINE THE PROJECT TO REDEFINE PROGRAM METHODOLOGY AND PRIORITIES FOR CLEANUP. WE CANNOT CURRENTLY ESTIMATE SPECIFIC CLEANUP AND BARGE REMOVAL COSTS; HOWEVER, COSTS COULD EXCEED ONE MILLION DOLLARS PER BARGE, DEPENDING UPON THE QUANTITY OF WASTE AND THE PRESENCE OF HAZARDOUS SUBSTANCES.

LEGAL AND FINANCIAL ISSUES ARE ALSO A MAJOR CONCERN. AT PRESENT, MEMBERS OF THE COAST GUARD LEGAL STAFF ARE EXAMINING THE LEGAL BASIS FOR DISPOSING OF THESE BARGES. TO MINIMIZE COSTS, WE HAVE, IN THE PAST, TRIED TO REMOVE THE THREAT TO THE PUBLIC AND THE ENVIRONMENT THROUGH CLEANUP ACTIONS WHILE ALLOWING THE BARGES TO REMAIN IN PLACE. OUR RECENT EXPERIENCE SHOWS THAT UNLESS EXTRAORDINARY MEANS ARE TAKEN TO SECURE THE BARGE OPENINGS, ILLEGAL DUMPERS WILL CONTINUE TO FILL THEM WITH WASTES. WE MAY BE ABLE TO SEAL THE TANKS BY WELDING THE OPENINGS SHUT, TO PREVENT THE BARGES FROM BEING REFILLED. THOUGH THIS MAY APPEAR TO BE THE MOST ECONOMIC WAY TO STOP FUTURE DUMPING, IT IS FAR FROM IDEAL FROM A SAFETY PERSPECTIVE. ALSO, ON NAVIGABLE WATERWAYS, THE BARGES AND THEIR MOORINGS MUST BE FREQUENTLY INSPECTED TO ENSURE THAT THE BARGES ARE ADEQUATELY SECURED. THIS WOULD OBVIOUSLY BE VERY TIME-CONSUMING AND RESOURCE-INTENSIVE.

IN THE LONG RUN, THE SOLUTION TO THE PROBLEM OF ABANDONED BARGES--AS WITH OTHER FORMS OF ENVIRONMENTAL ABUSE--IS PREVENTION. OWNERS OF ABANDONED VESSELS WHO REFUSE TO TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR CLEANUP AND REMOVAL MUST BE HELD LIABLE FOR CLEANUP COSTS.

PREVENTION MIGHT ALSO BE ENHANCED BY INCREASED LAW ENFORCEMENT ACTIVITIES, SUCH AS STAKEOUTS, UNDERCOVER OPERATIONS, AND INCREASED PATROLS AND OVERFLIGHTS. HOWEVER, THE COAST GUARD ALONE IS SIMPLY NOT ABLE TO MOUNT A CAMPAIGN OF SUFFICIENT SIZE TO MAKE THIS A VIABLE OPTION. THE SOLUTION REQUIRES COOPERATIVE EFFORTS IN WHICH ALL REGULATORY AND LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES IN A

PARTICULAR AREA COLLECTIVELY ADDRESS SPECIFIC PROBLEMS.

FINALLY, WE SHOULD NOT OVERLOOK THE VALUE OF PUBLIC EDUCATION. AN AWARENESS CAMPAIGN--AIMED AT THE MARITIME COMMUNITY--THAT ADDRESSES ILLEGAL DUMPING, AND PROPER OIL AND HAZARDOUS SUBSTANCE DISPOSAL METHODS IS VITAL TO SUCCESS. SUCH A CAMPAIGN WOULD RAISE THE PUBLIC CONSCIOUSNESS REGARDING THE HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENTAL RISKS ASSOCIATED WITH ABANDONED BARGES AND ILLEGAL DUMPING, AND CREATE AN ATMOSPHERE OF INTOLERANCE FOR SUCH PRACTICES.

I THANK YOU FOR THE OPPORTUNITY TO ADDRESS THIS ISSUE. I WILL BE HAPPY TO ANSWER ANY QUESTIONS.