



Tanker and Barge Collision in New Orleans, LA Update August 4, 1000 EDT



A padeye is welded to a portion of Barge DM932. Padeyes like this one were used to lift the barge off the bottom of the Mississippi on Sunday. Photo Credit: USCG (PA3 Young)

Notable Developments:

- On Sunday the salvage team successfully secured the barge. The lift was originally planned for 8 a.m. but delayed until 1 p.m. The barge is now suspended off the river bottom by a crane. This will allow crews to pump out the remaining oil. The barge is leaking a small amount of oil but skimmers are working to collect the oil. Once the oil is extracted the barge will be cut up and hauled away by barge.
- Dredging operations at the Head of Passes resumed Saturday after being stopped by discovery of sunken oil in dredged material. As long as dredging continues, the depth of the navigation channel can be maintained against the deposition of sediments from the Mississippi River.

- The entire length of the river's ship channel remains open to deep-draft vessels. More than 500 vessels have been cleared, inspected and/or decontaminated and released since operations began. The river was temporarily closed to vessel traffic during the lift operation but was reopened by 1600 local time on Sunday.
- The USCG reports that more than 139,000 gallons of an oil/water mix has been recovered to date. More than 2,000 responders are currently deployed throughout the region affected by the spill.
- The USCG released audio recordings from the Vessel Traffic Service on Saturday. This recording indicated that the captain of the tug pushing the barge failed repeatedly to respond to radio communications.
- The Coast Guard is still investigating the cause of the incident and preliminary findings were released over the weekend. Initial findings of fact are as follows:
 - There were no mechanical or electrical issues with the Tintamara (the double-hulled tanker that struck Barge DM932 while it was being moved by the tug Mel Oliver).
 - There were no crew competency issues with the Tintamara.
 - There were no competency issues with the pilot aboard the Tintamara.
 - The Tintamara called out via radio to the Mel Oliver prior to the collision.
 - The captain of the Mel Oliver was not aboard the vessel at the time of the collision.
 - Mel Oliver had an assigned crew of a Captain, Steersman apprentice, and two deck hands.
 - The steersman apprentice was operating the Mel Oliver at the time of the collision. He was licensed but his license did not authorize him to operate the vessel without the captain's presence in the wheelhouse.
 - The Mel Oliver did not return the radio call outs from the Tintamara prior to the collision.
 - Vessel traffic service called out to the Mel Oliver prior to the collision.
 - The Mel Oliver did not answer the vessel traffic service prior to the collision.
 - The Mel Oliver was moving the barge DM 932.
 - As the Mel Oliver was pushing against the bow of barge DM 392, the Tintamara made contact with the port side of barge DM 392.
 - Drug and alcohol testing was done on the bridge and watch crew of the Tintamara and the Mel Oliver.
 - An independent survey relating to the mechanical and electrical system was conducted on the Mel Oliver and it has been moved to dry dock to be inspected, reports on the survey and the inspection are pending.
 - The formal hearing has been scheduled for Aug. 12, 2008. The pilot of the Tintamara, the Tintamara, the steersman of the Mel Oliver, the Captain of the Mel Oliver, DRD towing, American Commercial Lines, and the Mel Oliver have been named as parties of interest.

NOAA Products and Services

- **Trajectory Assessment for Salvage Operation.** NOAA prepared an updated trajectory analysis for the lifting operation in the event that the barge spilled a significant amount of oil. The lift went smoothly with the loss of only a small amount of oil.
- **Weather Support.** The NWS continues to provide daily weather forecasts to the Unified Command. Tropical storm Edouard is moving westward in the Gulf of Mexico. As of Sunday Evening, warnings were in place from the Mouth of the Mississippi River to Cameron Louisiana (near the Texas Border).
- **Sunken Oil Assessments.** NOAA continues to work on the issue of sunken oil transport. On Friday oil was found near Venice, LA (about 80 miles downriver from the site of the spill). The propeller wash from a vessel re-suspended black oil that stranded in an area referred to as the “jump” a channel used by small vessels.
- **Shoreline Assessments.** The shoreline assessment teams continue to survey the extent and severity of oil. NOAA prepared updated shoreline and aerial maps of the spill area.
- **Natural Resource Injury Assessments.** NOAA continued to implement a stranded oil sampling study to evaluate the environmental risk of discharged oil to natural resources. NOAA also reviewed a variety of proposals for injury assessment to birds, recreational use, and oiled shorelines.
- **Economic Damage Assessments.** The trustees evaluated recreational use at several locations in the area affected by oil to characterize lost human use. NOAA natural resource economists continue to support on-scene assessment activities designed to evaluate the magnitude of lost recreational use as a result of the oil discharge from the DM932.

Background on Incident

On July 23, 2008, a 600-foot chemical tanker and 200-foot fuel barge collided near downtown New Orleans, LA. The collision tore the barge "DM932" in half, discharging an estimated 419,000 gallons of #6 fuel oil, viscous tar-like oil. The barge had just loaded the oil at Stone Oil Co. in Gretna, across the river from the accident site, and was on its way to Memphis. The double-hulled tanker “Tintomara,” loaded with styrene and biodiesel and outbound for Europe, had only minor damage and did not spill any material. Oil from the barge is now spread over a hundred miles of the lower Mississippi River and a major cleanup operation is underway. NOAA is providing technical support to the Unified Command and is working with the local resource agencies to conduct a preliminary natural resource damage assessment. The accident is under investigation by the U.S. Coast Guard and the National Transportation Safety Board.