

Peter J. Marsh  
100 39th St, Unit 402, Astoria, Oregon 97103  
Letter of Support for the Salvage Chief Foundation in Senate Bill 826

I began reporting on commercial maritime affairs on the Columbia River and the Pacific Northwest coast in 1988, when the Salvage Chief was frequently called on to assist in ship wrecks of every type, and gained a reputation for its crew's ability to save ships that seemed almost beyond hope of rescue. Early in 1989, the shipping community was confronted by the ecological disaster caused when the Exxon Valdez struck Bligh Reef in Alaska's Prince William Sound on March 24, 1989. Over 11 million gallons of crude oil was spilled into this pristine bay, and the tanker was eventually refloated by the Salvage Chief.

This disaster forced Congress to pass the Oil Pollution Act of 1990, which enforced strict marine safety rules to prevent a repeat of this type of ecological disaster. Today, an entire fleet of powerful tugs and an oil-spill response team is permanently based in Valdez and the region is recovering from the after effects of the pollution. With vastly improved navigation and communications thanks to computing and satellite technology, one might reasonably assume that shipping is far safer today—and this is true, but only until the next accident!

So it is with some irony I report that after many years free from accidents, the latest major shipping incident on the west coast happened today April 28, when a U.S.-flagged containership, the 984' President Eisenhower, suffered a fire in California's Santa Barbara Channel this morning. This shut down the engine and left the ship drifting out of control towards shore north of Santa Barbara until it was taken in tow rescued by the 4750-horsepower Brusco tug Teresa Brusco. (Coincidentally, this tug was built in Portland by Diversified Marine.) Had this event occurred off the Oregon coast, where a strong west wind blows much of the time, it could well have ended up like the New Carissa, which ran onto the beach north of Coos Bay in February 1999 and subsequently broke apart.

Another recent event, the blocking of the Suez Canal, shows how a minor error in pilotage can easily block a major sea route, like the Columbia River. The Salvage Chief was re-built and equipped to handle nautical crises like this, plus assist in other natural events like the eruption of Mount St Helens in 1980, which blocked the Columbia with a huge flow of volcanic sediment, or the tsunami or earthquake that scientists predict is likely to occur in the next century. Less severe events like major storms can also cause communications with the NW coast to break down, resulting in the need for a mobile fully-functioning H.Q. like the Salvage Chief.

Therefore, I recommend the State of Oregon to support Senate Bill 826 and the Salvage Chief Foundation as a training facility, anchor tug, and floating emergency center at a remarkably low cost.

Sincerely,  
Peter J. Marsh