



Lake Carriers' Association

For Immediate Release

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Thick Ice Hampers Resumption of Lakes Coal Trade

CLEVELAND—Only three coal cargos moved on the Great Lakes in March, likely the lowest total in a decade or more.

The slumping economy played a role in the anemic total – only 116,259 tons – but the heavy ice on the Lakes prompted many vessel operators to delay putting vessels into service. While some vessels have ice-strengthened bows, freighters need icebreaking assistance from the U.S. Coast Guard. The ice formations in March were significant and vessel operators were concerned there would be a repeat of the opening of the 2008 season when ice-related damages to vessels totaled more than \$1.3 million. One company held back four vessels and in total forfeited 20 steaming days. Another company that usually sends out a number of vessels once the locks at Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan open on March 25 decided to not begin operations until the first week of April because of concerns about their ability to transit in the thick ice.

“It is unfortunate that the U.S. Coast Guard’s icebreaking assets on the Great Lakes are inadequate to meet the needs of commerce,” said James H.I. Weakley, President of Lake Carriers’ Association. “We know the crews on those icebreakers do the very best they can, but five of the Coast Guard’s eight icebreaking assets were built in the late 1970s and experience has shown they are prone to mechanical problems. Two other vessels were not designed with icebreaking as their primary mission. A vessel operator will not send a freighter that cost tens of millions of dollars into heavy ice when there is no assurance that icebreaking assets will be able to maintain the shipping lanes and respond in a timely manner to a vessel beset in ice. That’s why it is so important that Congress pass H.R. 1747, The Great Lakes Icebreaker Replacement Act introduced last month by Congressman James L. Oberstar (D-MN). That bill would fund construction of a twin to the heavy icebreaker *Mackinaw* launched in 2006. That vessel has proven extremely capable and a twin would greatly increase the Coast Guard’s icebreaking capabilities on the Great Lakes.”

Further exacerbating the problem is that Canada has significantly downsized its icebreaking fleet on the Lakes. In the early 1980s, Canada had seven icebreakers stationed on the Lakes. The fleet now numbers two vessels.

Lake Carriers’ Association represents 18 American corporations that operate 65 U.S.-Flag vessels on the Great Lakes. These vessels carry the raw materials that drive the nation’s economy: Iron ore and fluxstone for the steel industry, limestone, and cement for the construction industry, coal for power generation.... Collectively, these vessels can transport more than 115 million tons of cargo a year when high water levels offset the lack of adequate dredging of Great Lakes ports and waterways. More information is available at www.lcaships.com.

Source: Lake Carriers’ Association.

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Information based on data from knowledgeable sources. However, accuracy cannot be guaranteed. Lake Carriers’ Association assumes no legal responsibility for the outcome of decisions or commitments made on the basis of this information. This report represents the views of Lake Carriers’ Association and may not necessarily represent the views of its individual members.

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The Association Representing Operators of U.S.-Flag Vessels on the Great Lakes

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