



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

September 11, 2019

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NOSAC Approves Final OMSA-Driven Report on the use of OSVs in Disaster Response

Houston, TX – Today, the National Offshore Safety Advisory Committee (NOSAC) approved recommendations to increase the ability of energy-industry vessels to assist in disaster response activities. The proposal can be found in the final report entitled, “Use of Offshore Supply Vessels (OSVs) and other vessels in restoration and recovery efforts.” The report was produced by a team of industry experts on the Restoration and Recovery Activities Subcommittee.

Today’s report finalizes and builds upon an interim report approved by NOSAC in March of this year. Those recommendations were submitted on an interim basis with the hope that they could be implemented prior to the 2019 Hurricane Season. Both reports are the product of an OMSA proposal, made after Hurricane Maria in 2017. In Hurricane Maria’s aftermath, several Louisiana-based vessels attempted to carry cargo to or between ports in Puerto Rico. While these vessels were capable of safely completing these tasks, many were turned away due to strict or differing interpretations of U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) regulations.

Of the report, OMSA President Aaron Smith said, “U.S. companies have invested billions in building complex and versatile vessels and the training of American mariners to safely operate those vessels. This report creates an innovative framework for utilizing these investments to help Americans and our neighbors in their time of need.” Smith continued, “My hat is off to the Subcommittee, it is invigorating to see how the team of industry experts were able to apply their talents to a project which will expedite and streamline disaster response.”

The final report makes numerous recommendations to the U.S. Coast Guard. The most important of which include:

- The USCG apply the District 8 (the USCG District covering the Gulf of Mexico) Policy Letter 09-2001 nationwide. This policy letter provides a pathway for energy-industry vessels to participate in other industries by spelling out reasonable design, mission, and capability requirements on such vessels.
- The USCG apply the District 8 Policy Letter 01-2017 nationwide. This policy letter allows energy-industry vessels to provide emergency berthing to emergency response workers, thereby opening up hotel rooms for disaster victims and allowing disaster personnel to stay closer to where they are working.
- The USCG create and publish explicit instructions outlining how vessel operators may become a pre-approved disaster response resource.
- The USCG and other concerned federal agencies create a formal communication protocol by which needs and requirements during disasters are explicitly stated both internally (between agencies) and externally (to the industry).
- That USCG redefine the phrase “international voyage” to clarify that a U.S. vessel is not on an international voyage when it sails from the U.S. mainland to Puerto Rico. -

In perhaps its most groundbreaking recommendation, the final report proposes the creation of a Response, Restoration, and Recovery Vessel (TRV) endorsement. This endorsement will be attached to a vessel's Certificate of Inspection (COI) and would allow the vessel to supersede its operating restrictions if participating in the recovery of a federally declared disaster. The TRV endorsement would be issued outside times of disaster, after an assessment of the vessel's capabilities, and a review of its anticipated disaster response activities.

While the Subcommittee's recommendation of a TRV endorsement would allow vessels to supersede their operating restrictions, the report does not recommend that they be allowed to take priority over correctly certificated vessels. Instead, the report recommends that vessels with the correct certifications be utilized first. If such a vessel could not be readily found or mobilized the government would turn to a TRV-endorsed vessel. The report does note that this tiered based response will require more coordination between the USCG, the Maritime Administration (MARAD), and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), something the report found was severely lacking during Hurricane Maria.

The NOSAC report signifies a truly groundbreaking effort that tackles many of the regulatory challenges confronted in 2017 by vessel operators in the aftermath of Hurricane Maria. While it addresses many of the challenges, the work is not yet complete according to Chad Fuhrmann, Co-Chair of the Restoration and Recovery Activities Subcommittee. "This initiative doesn't end here." Fuhrmann said. "With the continuing threats to the Jones Act, this report denotes only the beginning of a long-term effort promoting the use of existing and extraordinarily capable U.S. resources in defense and support of humanitarian and national interests."

About NOSAC:

The National Offshore Safety Advisory Committee (NOSAC) is established under the Federal Advisory Committee Act to provide expert industry advice to the U.S. Coast Guard. For more information about NOSAC, click [here](#).

About OMSA:

The Offshore Marine Service Association OMSA is the leading association of and spokesman and advocate for the offshore marine transportation service industry in the United States. The association represents 170-member companies and their 12,000 U.S. employees based throughout the U.S. For more information, please visit www.offshoremarine.org.

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