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THOUGHT LEADERSHIP

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New Orleans Vessel Collision Triggers Mississippi River Restrictions: What Shippers Need to Know

On November 13, the tanker Atlantic Asphalt struck the American Heritage, a river cruise vessel docked at New Orleans' Thalia Street Terminal for passenger disembarkation. The collision left the cruise vessel on its side and partially submerged. As of November 15, a safety zone covers river mile markers 95.5 to 96.5 and extends 500 feet outward. Within the zone, deep-draft vessels and towing vessels with 10 or more barges may transit in one direction only. Before entering the area, all vessels must coordinate with Vessel Traffic Service Lower Mississippi River and proceed at their slowest safe speed. The Coast Guard continues to lead river operations as the response shifts toward vessel recovery and the return of normal waterway traffic.

What This Means for You

Importers, exporters, and other cargo owners using New Orleans or this portion of the Mississippi River should check their shipment exposure, particularly if they have time-sensitive cargo, limited inventory, or firm customer delivery commitments. Controlled vessel traffic could affect schedules even without cargo damage. Specifically:

Confirm shipment status. Ask carriers and forwarders whether the safety zone and one-way transit affect your shipment's schedule. Confirm cargo location, terminal access, and any changes to pickup arrangements or free time.

Check rerouting costs. Review bills of lading, service contracts, and tariffs before authorizing a diversion. Confirm who will arrange and pay for additional inland transportation, handling, and storage.

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Scrutinize additional charges. Request the basis and records for demurrage, detention, or other charges. Document cargo availability and pickup efforts, and check notice and dispute deadlines.

Protect customer commitments. Review delivery obligations and force majeure provisions before promising new dates or invoking relief. Give appropriate notices, compare alternatives for urgent shipments, and preserve communications and incremental-cost records.

Contact Us

Our Transportation & Logistics team advises shippers, cargo owners, and carriers on maritime contract review, force majeure analysis, cargo claims, insurance coverage, and supply chain risk management. Because each client's contracts, trade lanes, and business operations require a tailored preparation strategy, affected shippers should review their individual contracts and contact us for a focused assessment. If you have questions, please contact Julie Maurer, Benjamin Nashed, Serena Tang, or your Husch Blackwell attorney.

This article provides general legal information. It does not constitute legal advice to the reader and does not create an attorney-client relationship between the reader and Husch Blackwell LLP. The reader should seek legal advice if they have questions about how this legal information may apply to their own circumstances.

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