

by letter dated March 11, 2003, as amended, requests approval for the temporary transfer of the ASPHALT COMMANDER (O.N. 663105) to the domestic trade for a period up to six months commencing on April 1, 2003. Sargeant advises that the ASPHALT COMMANDER would load asphalt and #6 fuel oil in Texas and discharge at any combination of ports from Tampa, Florida, then south to the southern tip of Florida, plus any port on the East Coast of the United States from Florida to Maine, plus Puerto Rico, during the requested six month period in the domestic trade in order to alleviate the shortage of these products on the East Coast, Florida and Puerto Rico. The ASPHALT COMMANDER (ex FALCON CHAMPION) was built with the aid of construction-differential subsidy (CDS) and is prohibited from operation in the exclusive domestic trade without the prior written permission of the Maritime Administration (MARAD).

DATES: You should submit your comments early enough to ensure that Docket Management receives them not later than closes of business March 27, 2003.

ADDRESSES: Your comments should refer to docket number MARAD 2003-14708. You may submit your comments in writing to: Docket Clerk, U.S. DOT Dockets, Room PL-401, 400 7th St., SW., Washington, DC 20590. You may also submit them electronically via the Internet at <http://dmses.dot.gov/submit>. You may call Docket Management at (202) 366-9324 and visit the Docket Room from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., EST., Monday through Friday, except Federal Holidays. An electronic version of this document is available on the World Wide Web at <http://dms.dot.gov>.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: You may call Gregory V. Sparkman, Chief, Division of Shipping Analysis, (202) 366-2400. You may send mail to Gregory V. Sparkman, Chief, Division of Shipping Analysis, Room 8117, Maritime Administration, 400 Seventh St., SW., Washington, DC 20590.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Comments

How Do I Prepare and Submit Comments?

Your comments must be written and in English. To ensure that your comments are correctly filed in the Docket, please include the docket number of this document in your comments. We encourage you to write your primary comments in a concise fashion. However, you may attach necessary additional documents to your

comments. There is no limit on the length of the attachments. Please submit two copies of your comments, including the attachments, to Docket Management at the address given above under

ADDRESSES.

If you wish Docket Management to notify you upon its receipt of your comments, enclose a self-addressed, stamped postcard in the envelope containing your comments. Docket Management will return the postcard by mail.

How Do I Submit Confidential Business Information?

If you wish to submit any information under a claim of confidentiality, you should submit three copies of your complete submission, including the information you claim to be confidential business information, to the Chief Counsel, Maritime Administration, at the address given above under **FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT.** You should mark "CONFIDENTIAL" on each page of the original document that you would like to keep confidential. In addition, you should submit two copies, from which you have deleted the claimed confidential business information, to Docket Management at the address given above under **ADDRESSES.** When you send comments containing information claimed to be confidential business information, you should include a cover letter setting forth with specificity the basis for any such claim.

Will the Agency Consider Late Comments?

We will consider all comments that Docket Management receives before the close of business on the comment closing date indicated above under **DATES.** To the extent possible, we will also consider comments that Docket Management receives after that date.

How Can I Read the Comments Submitted by Other People?

You may read the comments received by Docket Management at the address given above under **ADDRESSES.** The hours of the Docket Room are indicated above in the same location. You may also see the comments on the Internet. To read the comments on the Internet, take the following steps: Go to the Docket Management System (DMS) Web page of the Department of Transportation <http://dms.dot.gov>. On that page, click on "search." On the next page <http://dms.dot.gov/search/> type in the four-digit docket number shown at the beginning of this document. The docket number for this document is MARAD 2203-14708. After typing the

docket number, click on "search." On the next page, which contains docket summary information for the docket you selected, click on the desired comments. You may download the comments.

Application Request

Pursuant to section 506 of the Merchant Marine Act, 1936, as amended (Act), Sargeant Marine, Inc. (Sargeant), by letter dated March 11, 2003, requests approval for the temporary transfer of the ASPHALT COMMANDER (O.N. 663105) to the domestic trade for a period up to six months commencing on April 1, 2003. Sargeant advises that the ASPHALT COMMANDER would load asphalt and #6 fuel oil in Texas and discharge at any combination of ports from Tampa, Florida, then south to the southern tip of Florida, plus any port on the East Coast of the United States from Florida to Maine, plus Puerto Rico, during the requested six month period in the domestic trade in order to alleviate the shortage of these products on the East Coast, Florida and Puerto Rico. The ASPHALT COMMANDER (the ex FALCON CHAMPION) was built with construction-differential subsidy (CDS) and is prohibited from operating in the exclusive domestic trade without the prior written permission of the Maritime Administration (MARAD).

Sargeant provides the following information in support of its section 506 waiver request for the ASPHALT COMMANDER to operate in the domestic trade for up to six months commencing April 1, 2003:

Sargeant states that there are fundamental problems of product imbalance and a lack of adequate ocean-going transportation for the distribution of asphalt and #6 fuel oil in the United States in 2003. The events that have caused this imbalance are unique in 2003 and are not expected to recur in future years.

Sargeant advises that generally, the United States imports approximately four million tons of asphalt, of which 60 percent, or 2.4 million tons, comes into Petroleum Administration for Defense District (PADD) I, which is the U.S. East Coast. About 60 percent of PADD I imports come from Venezuela. Since December 2, 2002, Venezuela has not exported asphalt due to disruptions in its oil industry. It is not known when Venezuela will resume normal asphalt production. Other sources of imported asphalt from Mexico and Spain are not sufficient to handle the loss of product from Venezuela. As a result, the current inventory levels of PADD I are extremely low.

Sargeant states that usually at this time of year PADD I asphalt inventory