



October 3, 2011

Montebello Assessment Unified Command News Release

Coast Guard, California attempt to determine oil presence on sunken WWII ship

SAN PEDRO, Calif. – The Coast Guard awarded a contract to Global Diving and Salvage Inc. to determine if oil is present aboard the sunken ship S.S. Montebello, which sits 900 feet below the ocean surface approximately 6.5 miles off the coast of Cambria, Calif.

The S.S. Montebello sank after a Japanese submarine torpedoed the large oil tanker on December 23, 1941. The Montebello broke apart and sank landing upright with her bow broken off and landing apart from the majority of the wreckage.

Multiple dive operations have been conducted between 1996 and 2010 to survey the site and determine the hull's integrity. To date, no signs of leakage have been detected, and from previous scans, the hull appears to be intact.

“The California coast is a vital national resource that we must protect,” said Coast Guard Capt. Roger Laferriere, who is acting as the Federal On-Scene Coordinator. “Working in concert with our state and local partners, it is our duty to ensure we gain good information about the Montebello so we can do our best to protect the marine environment.”

“This sampling and observation operation will provide the answers needed to truly assess what threat, if any, the Montebello poses,” said Capt. Chris Graff from California Department of Fish and Game’s Office of Spill Prevention and Response, who will be serving as the State On-Scene Coordinator.

A special remotely operated vehicle will be sent to retrieve oil and sediment samples. OSPR and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration technicians will independently conduct testing of the samples.

Observations and sampling of the wreck will be made within a two week period beginning on or about Oct. 10, 2011. The two-week time frame is considered the best window of opportunity to do an observation patrol on the sunken vessel because, historically, the weather is best in that particular stretch of the Central Coast.

A Joint Information Center will be stood up in Cambria during operations but in the interim media inquiries can be made by contacting Coast Guard Petty Officer 1st Class Adam Eggers at (310) 521-4260 or Mr. Andrew Hughan with California DFG OSPR at (916) 322-8944.

To keep up to date on the latest S.S. Montebello news and information, visit OSPR’s website at <http://www.dfg.ca.gov/ospr/Admin/Montebello/index.aspx> or visit the Coast Guard in Los Angeles’ website at <http://www.uscglosangeles.com> and select the “S.S. Montebello” menu tab.

OSPR will be releasing updates via Twitter (@CaliforniaDFG) and Facebook page (<http://www.facebook.com/CaliforniaDFG>).

For more information on the S.S. Montebello, visit <http://www.dfg.ca.gov/ospr/Admin/Montebello/index.aspx>