

National Maritime Day

COMMENTARY ON THE IMPORTANCE OF THE MARITIME INDUSTRY TO AMERICA'S TRADE

41 percent of all U.S. international freight by merchandise value arrives and departs the country by ship, 26 percent by air, and the rest (including cross-border trade with Canada and Mexico) is moved in and out by truck, rail and barge. Subtracting out the cross-border traffic and looking at merchandise weight instead of value, 99 percent of international cargo moves into and out of the U.S. by ship and only 1 percent by air. This demonstrates the critical importance of the maritime industry to our economy.

In 1933, the U.S. Congress decreed May 22nd as National Maritime Day. Each year since then, May 22nd has become the day the United States observes its proud maritime heritage, honors the men and women who serve or have served as merchant mariners, and recognizes the many benefits that today's maritime industry provides.

This year, National Maritime Day comes on the heels of National Transportation Week, which, according to U.S. Transportation Secretary Norman Mineta, "is an opportunity to celebrate our achievements in transportation and face up to the challenges ahead."

The United States maritime industry is a critical part of the transportation network that moves goods worldwide from where they are grown, mined or manufactured to where they are ultimately consumed. It also provides for passenger transportation, both for business and pleasure. America's maritime transportation system is an economic generator, attracting private and public investment in plant and equipment. These investments create economic activity and sustain family-wage jobs, supply critical energy lines, and facilitate world exports.

Awareness activities include coordinating with individual ports and marine-related groups to combine local Maritime Day observance activities across the country, creating a link on the MARAD website -- www.marad.dot.gov -- that provides a history of National Maritime Day and its significance, and cites the myriad benefits of this industry to the nation and the world.

According to MARAD, the U.S. marine transportation system annually:

- Moves more than 2.5 billion tons of domestic and international freight
- Imports 3.3 billion barrels of oil to meet U.S. energy demands
- Transports 113 million passengers and 32 million vehicles by ferry
- Serves 78 million Americans engaged in recreational boating

Furthermore, more than 8 million passengers embarked on cruise ship voyages at U.S. ports in 2004, and that number is growing at an average of 8 percent annually.

Log on to www.marad.dot.gov to learn more.