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The Wreck of the New Carissa



Timeline

Feb. 4, 1999: The New Carissa runs aground near Coos Bay; the crew of 23 is evacuated the next day.



Feb. 6, 1999: Bill Milwee, a salvage expert on the spill response command team, says, "We have no fear. We'll get it out of here." Organizations and agencies involved when the ship was initially grounded include:

- State Land Board
- Department of State Lands
- Ports and Waterways Safety Committee
- US Coast Guard
- US Navy
- Aggreko (service cleanup)
- Coos County Board of Commissioners
- IFC Environmental Consulting



Feb. 8 1999: The ship begins leaking from two of its five fuel oil tanks. Crews begin deploying cleanup equipment.

Feb. 9, 1999: The tugboat Salvage Chief prepares to pull the vessel off the beach.



Feb. 10, 1999: The command team decides to burn the fuel oil onboard, but Navy explosives experts fail to ignite it. Using heavier explosives and napalm the next day, the Navy team sets the ship ablaze. Hours later, the stern section splits apart from the bow. For several days, crews try to reignite the remaining fuel.



Feb. 16, 1999: In an onboard inspection, officials discover 130,000 to 150,000 gallons of unburned fuel oil still on board.

Feb. 17, 1999: The tugboat Sea Victory prepares to tow the bow section to sea and sink it, but high seas foil the attempt. Officials announce plans to pump fuel oil off the ship before trying again.

Feb. 19, 1999: Pumping is postponed when crews discover rainwater has flooded the fuel tanks. Once the fuel oil is pumped ashore, the plan is to tow the bow 248 miles to sea and sink it in deep water. The next night, challenged by heavy winds and strong currents, crews begin pumping thick fuel oil from the ship through 700 feet of 4-inch-diameter hose to tanks on land.

Feb. 21, 1999: Stinging hail, gale-force winds and a kinked hose hamper the off-and-on attempts, but by afternoon, crews manage to pump 100,000 gallons of fluid from cargo hold No. 3 to tanks on shore but most of it is water.

Feb. 22, 1999: U.S. Coast Guard and salvage officials abandon oil-pumping efforts as overnight winds and breakers push the New Carissa at least 30 feet to the south. Punishing winds the next day block a helicopter from hooking the New Carissa to the tugboat Sea Victory.

Feb. 25, 1999: Bouncing in rough seas, the Sea Victory is unable to hold steady for hooking a towline to the ship. But conditions have improved enough to enable a helicopter to fly and for crews to complete most of the other towing connections.

Feb. 26, 1999: A helicopter lifts the towline to the Sea Victory, and the tug pulls hard for two hours.

The New Carissa's bow appears to pivot slightly seaward.



Feb. 27, 1999: The slightest jostle is cause for speculation and cautious celebration as the broken ship begins creeping into the sea. It inches forward 35 feet on a rising tide while the Sea Victory churns with 107 tons of pulling power.

Feb. 28, 1999: The morning tide is the highest yet, and the Sea Victory drags the New Carissa 35 feet in the morning and another 25 feet shortly before midnight.

Mar. 1, 1999: Buoyed by the high tide the New Carissa bow moves over a sandbar and more than 900 feet into the waves. Officials say a tow of another 400 feet will get it into water deep enough for its bottom to clear the beach.



Mar. 2, 1999: The New Carissa heads to sea, but jubilation turns to horror when, at 5:18 p.m. and about 40 miles out, the towline snaps amid one of the fiercest storms of the winter. The Sea Victory puts out an alert that the New Carissa is "freedriftng" on a northnortheast course at 6 mph.

Mar. 3, 1999: The New Carissa runs aground near Waldport about sunrise and begins leaking again.



Mar. 8, 1999: The Sea Victory yanks the bow off the beach again and heads to sea, reaching its rendezvous with a Navy destroyer three days later.

March 11, 1999: After the destroyer fails to scuttle the bow with explosives and artillery shells, a Navy submarine fires a torpedo, sinking the bow in 10,000 feet of water.



Photo courtesy Seattle Times

March 22, 1999: Global Diving and Marine of Seattle began removing paint, solvents and oil from the stern section.

May 7, 1999: Fred Devine Diving & Salvage of Portland and Donjon Marine Co. of Hillside, N.J., form a joint venture that wins the contract from the ship's owners to remove the stern.

June 5, 1999: Crews begin dismantling parts of the stern.

July 7, 1999: A derrick barge arrives in Coos Bay after a 5,700-mile journey through the Panama Canal from Newark, N.J. After weeks of delays, salvage crews cut the structure in half, and divers patch cracks in the engine room.

Oct. 5, 1999: The Salvage Chief hooks lines to the stern and prepares to scour a channel in the sand through which the hulk can be pulled to deeper water and then towed to a burial site 46 miles offshore. Crews onboard pump water out of the engine room to add buoyancy. A large portion of the ship was successfully towed and buried, but the bulk of her stern still remained on the beach.

Early 2001: The ship's owners begin efforts to file a \$96 million lawsuit against the federal government, charging bad navigational charts, lack of failure for a Coos Bay area bar pilot to advise against anchoring the ship due to expected harsh storms, and unpredictable weather as the cause for the ship's beaching. The lawsuit will not go to trial until 2004.

April 3, 2001: Captain John Noble, an independent salvage consultant for Portland salvage expert Bill Milwee, presented a review of options for removing the remaining portions of the New Carissa. The review was commissioned and paid for by the ship's owners. Captain Noble's recommendation was to

leave her in place on the beach, citing high risk to salvage workers if removal were attempted.

April 11, 2001: Gov. Kitzhaber, unhappy with the stalled removal of the New Carissa, announced the state would hire its own consultant to review a salvage expert's claim that the ship's remains should be left on the Coos Bay beach.

June 2001: A federal jury awarded Clausen Oyster Co. a \$1.4 million judgment against the New Carissa interests for damages to the company's oyster beds in Coos Bay.

August 2001: A consulting firm conducted soil testing near the shipwreck for an Environmental Impact Study for removal of the vessel commissioned by the ship's owners.

August 2001: In response to the \$96 million lawsuit filed by the ship's owners, the state sues for \$7 million to clean up the oil spill.

October 3, 2001: The state of Oregon filed a lawsuit against the ship's owners, including Green Atlas Shipping S.A., TMM Co. Ltd, the Japanese operator of the vessel, and Taiheiyo Kaiun Co., the parent company of both. The state lawsuit filed in Coos County charges trespass on the state's beach and sought a court order to remove the remainder of the ship, storage charges, the restoration of the beach to its original condition, and monetary relief.

November 12, 2002: Deliberations in Coos County began. The state claims that \$334 million is an appropriate amount for the ship's owners to pay for dumping hundreds of tons of garbage on their beach and leaving it there for decades. However, if the jury deemed that the pollution was temporary and correctible with the removal of the stern, the amount would likely be far less than \$334 million.

November 13, 2002: In a 10-2 ruling, a Coos County jury found the owners of the New Carissa guilty of negligent trespass and awarded Oregon \$25 million to pay for removing the ship's stern.

January 2003: The ship's owners transfer \$25 million into an escrow account, after a Coos County jury finds for the state in a lawsuit to remove the stern from the bay's North Spit.

February 4, 2004: At the five-year anniversary of the beaching of the New Carissa, environmental studies were still being conducted to gauge the long-term effects of the incident. Among the preliminary findings of a major study conducted by the federal Bureau of Land Management, 2,300 seabirds (mostly murrelets) died, 500-800 shorebirds suffered exposure to the oil, 23-100 seagulls were exposed, and the public lost 28,000 opportunities to visit the closed beaches.

April 2004: A three-week trial was scheduled in the ship owner's lawsuit against the government for \$96 million. The owners originally filed the lawsuit in 2001 in federal court in Portland.

June 8, 2004: In the case of Green Atlas Shipping S.A., et al v. United States,

- \$4 million was paid by the ship's owners to the federal government for damage to natural resources
- an additional \$6.5 million was paid by the owners to the government for oil spill cleanup costs incurred by the Coast Guard
- the federal government paid \$4 million to the owner, operator, and insurer in settlement of their \$96 million claim



New Carissa Wreck, Summer 2005 photo Tony Stein ODFW

May 22, 2007: Department of State Lands signed a \$16,428,500 contract with Titan Maritime, a worldwide marine salvage and shipwreck company, to remove the *New Carissa* wreckage by Oct. 1,

2008.

March 2008: Titan begins work on removing the wreckage; work continues through the summer and fall.

September 23, 2008: The last visible piece of the wreck was lifted out of the water. By September 28 the pieces remaining on the ocean floor were successfully removed by Titan.

Click [here](#) for additional information about the wreck removal, including photos.

Other photos courtesy U.S. Coast Guard and
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

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