

BAN PRESS RELEASE: SS Oceanic: US EPA Sues Ship Broker for Illegal Export but Allows 'Toxic Timebomb' to Sail

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20 March 2008 - Following a tip from the Basel Action Network (BAN) and Save the Classic Liners Campaign, the US Environmental Protection Agency has filed suit against a well known "cashbuyer" company that routinely buys ships from all over the world and sends them to the notorious breaking beaches of Bangladesh, Pakistan and India. This time, the company, Global Marketing Services (GMS) was caught illegally exporting the SS Oceanic (formerly SS Independence), an aged 682 foot ocean liner. However, the activist groups expressed shock that the EPA is only seeking to levy a fine and is not taking urgent action to stop the violation and bring the toxic ship back to the US.

"The government is letting the ship owners get away with what could be tantamount to murder," said Jim Puckett of the Basel Action Network. "Its merely slapping these perpetrators on the wrist and allowing the offense to continue. Lives are at stake here so why on earth is the government not demanding that the ship be turned back to US territory at once?" According to the activists, the ship is to be scrapped and is a "toxic timebomb" for the laborers on the infamous shipbreaking beaches of South Asia. The ship is estimated to be loaded with 210 tons of toxic polychlorinated biphenyl (PCB) contaminated material and 250 tons of asbestos as part of its construction[1]. GMS routinely sends ships to operations in South Asia which are infamous for endangering workers and the immediate environment by failing to safely manage asbestos, PCBs, toxic paints, and residual fuels. EPA filed suit because the export of PCBs is illegal under the Toxics Substances Control Act (TSCA). But the government has not filed an injunction against the ongoing export but is merely seeking fines. Furthermore, by the time the lawsuit is decided the damage will have been done. The government action stands in stark contrast to a lawsuit filed yesterday by the Justice Department in the case of the ship MV Sanctuary that has similarly been found with PCBs onboard. In that case the government requested an immediate injunction against export and is requiring the exporter to clean up all PCBs domestically. The last owner of the classic 1950 liner was Norwegian Cruise Lines (NCL). NCL already has a reputation for negligence and evasion of international and national environmental and safety laws. Currently another NCL liner, the former SS Norway is rotting away on the beach in India. An NCL shell company California Manufacturing Corporation sold the ship in July to GMS founded by Mr. Anil Sharma. Mr. Sharma's website brags of buying and facilitating more than 100 ships per year being exported to Asia for scrapping. According to BAN and the Save the Classic Liners Campaign the US Maritime Administration (MARAD) was warned of this latest export well prior to the vessel being allowed to leave San Francisco Bay on 8 February and that it was likely illegal and yet they did nothing to stop it. "We've seen this time and time again," said Corey Ablove, of the Save the Classic Liners Campaign. "The US Maritime Administration turns a blind eye or even assists in the re-flagging and export of toxic vessels even though they know very well that these exports may likely be illegal under US or international law. Such policies lead to workers dying, the environment suffering, historic preservation thwarted and our own domestic ship recycling industry denied business and jobs. And now EPA is merely going to merely fine the owners some thousands of dollars when they stand to make millions dumping poisons. If this stands its a shameful lose lose lose scenario," he said. After leaving San Francisco Bay on February 8th, the ship and its tug passed Hawaii and Guam without coming into port to refuel. It is now thought to be near Saipan and is being allowed to continue on its way. The activists continue to view this ship as a fugitive and urges mariners to report its whereabouts. For more information, visit [Basel Action Network website](#)