

NEW ORLEANS PORT EYES SEPTEMBER 14 FOR RESTART AFTER HURRICANE KATRINA

BY PHILIP BURGERT

■ CHICAGO — The Port of New Orleans has set a goal of September 14 for working its first commercial cargo ship as the port and other Gulf Coast shipping operations struggle back from disruptions caused by Hurricane Katrina.

The New Orleans port, a leading US entry point for steel, aluminium and raw materials for metal production, was clogged late last week with military and other vessels involved in relief efforts throughout the flooded city.

"We know this is an aggressive schedule in the wake of the damage that we have sustained," said Gary LaGrange, the port's president and ceo. "But we have many port assets that survived the storm in good shape."

The port is still struggling to secure labour, diesel fuel, electricity and transport, executives said. They said port terminal operators had made contact with dock workers who were ready to return to work, and the US Maritime Administration (Marad), part of the Transportation Dept, is providing several ships to house 1,000 people to operate the port.



Relief effort: New Orleans port is clogged with military and other vessels involved in the mammoth effort to evacuate and clear the city after Hurricane Katrina

The port has been working with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), Louisiana state agencies and Marad to get diesel fuel that is needed for relief in New Orleans and to help prepare for a resumption of commercial operations. A request

for fuel made to FEMA soon after Katrina struck was still pending on September 8, a spokesman said.

"The City of New Orleans was founded along the Mississippi River because the river is a great transportation resource, and it is important we use the river to help

rebuild the city and its economy," LaGrange said.

The Mississippi River was open for most of last week in both directions simultaneously during daylight hours to ships with a draft limit of 39 feet, according to the port and the US Dept of Homeland Security. Twenty vessels were in line to pass through the lower Mississippi on September 7.

While the New Orleans port's headquarters near the convention center in downtown New Orleans has power, there is no water service and its wharves do not have power, executives said.

Two of the port's four gantry cranes at its uptown cargo facilities are expected to work when power is restored, but the other two cranes are believed to have damaged electrical components. Six wharves at the port were assessed as heavily damaged, six moderately damaged and eight workable whenever electricity and manpower become available, Homeland Security said.

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