

Algeciras cleanup greeted by placards

Cleaning up the environment and assuaging public opinion in the wake of an oil spill creating a new dimension to the maritime industry that is forcing many to change long established working practises. As Joop Timmermans, president of the International Salvage Union, says "The maritime industry must keep in step with public opinion." Speaking at the ISU's conference in London, he said that the relationship between the industry, regulators and the general public is a delicate one. Gordon Amos, managing director of Titan Marine (UK) agreed, and spoke of a recent experience in the Spanish port of Algeciras. Having successfully salvaged a small bunker barge holding 1,000 cubic metres of black fuel and 30 cu m of marine diesel, he and his crew "were greeted at portside by environmental protestors waving placards rather than company men with champagne bottles. It was a huge shock for us," he said. The job was done within close proximity of tourist beaches and no oil seeped out of the stricken barge. Cost estimates of the salvage have been put at ten times the Euro750,000 value put on the vessel and cargo, Mr Amos said. His comments were echoed by Arnold Witte, president of US-based Donjon Marine. Environmental factors "permeate and drive every emergency solution... environmental considerations can stall and complicated an effective, prompt salvage by the extending (the start of a salvage job) beyond a reasonable timetable." Acknowledging the "necessity to conduct all operations with a view toward maximum environmental protection, all too often the priorities of all of the interested parties who contribute to our ICS (Incident Command System) become argumentative, combative and confusing to the point of creating almost unsolvable obstacles to a prompt salvage."