



THE COMMANDANT OF THE UNITED STATES COAST GUARD  
WASHINGTON 20593

29 December 2004

The Commandant of the Coast Guard takes pleasure in presenting the COAST GUARD  
MERITORIOUS TEAM COMMENDATION to:

**THE CONTAINER SHIP CSAV RIO PUELO MULTI-AGENCY RESPONSE TEAM**

for service as set forth in the following

**CITATION:**

"For exceptionally meritorious service while responding to a threat of an unknown hazardous biological substance aboard the M/V CSAV RIO PUELO in the Port of New York/New Jersey from 29 July to 18 August 2004. The Coast Guard, along with personnel from over 25 federal, state, and local agencies, as well as the private sector, formed a highly effective response team to address numerous security, safety, environmental, technical, legal, and policy issues for a successful response operation. This was the first significant maritime cargo security threat response since the full implementation of the Maritime Transportation Security Act and the International Ship and Port Facility Security Code, and was an excellent example of information sharing. The US Department of Agriculture notified the USCG on July 29th that they had received an e-mail stating one of five containers of lemons on board the RIO PUELO contained a "harmful biological substance". The USCG, along with its Department of Homeland Security port partners, worked very closely the State of New Jersey and the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, along with an extensive array of other agency representatives, to safely and quickly resolve the safety and security concerns. Members of the USCG Atlantic Strike Team boarded the ship on July 31st to conduct screening tests and take swab samples for biological hazards. The vessel was brought into port, where support equipment provided by US Customs and Border Protection such as the Vehicle and Cargo Inspection System (VACIS) helped determine if the suspect containers had any anomalies inside, then fumigated with chlorine dioxide gas to kill any biological agents that might have been present. The containers were then taken to an incinerator where the lemon cargo was destroyed. All along, an aggressive investigation was conducted to determine the original source of the report. Through the use of the Incident Command System, a successfully coordinated operation ensured all concerned stakeholders were engaged at a multi-agency forward command post and via extensive teleconference briefings and situation reports. The Unified Command developed extensive Courses of Action (COAs), along with detailed logistic plans to execute the chosen COA. They also established contingency plans to quickly evacuate the containers out to sea if any explosive or dispersal devices were identified in the containers. Based on the coordinated efforts of all involved, a safe entry, testing, treatment, and disposal plan was thoroughly developed and executed that provided minimal risk to the health and safety of over 2 million citizens living in close proximity to the incident, with minimal impact on the free flow of commerce in and out of the port. The dedication, pride, and professionalism displayed by the Container Ship CSAV RIO PUELO Multi-Agency Response Team are in keeping with the highest traditions of the United States Coast Guard.

The Operational Distinguishing Device is authorized.

For the Commandant,

G. A. WILTSHIRE

Captain, U. S. Coast Guard  
Commander, Coast Guard Activities New York