For immediate release:

TOXIC SHIPS FROM USA NOT WELCOME IN EUROPE
NEW REPORT CONDEMNS TOXIC ‘GHOST FLEET’ EXPORT

Geneva, London. 22 October 2003.  In the midst of growing European dissent over the impending arrival of the first four of 13 toxic, deteriorating ex-naval vessels from the US “ghost fleet”, a new report, *Needless Risk*, was released jointly today by the Basel Action Network in Geneva and Friends of the Earth UK in London. The report details not only the environmental threat posed by the risky towage of aged naval vessels, but likewise exposes the fact that the United States has the adequate technical capacity to deal with the ships safely at home and that the trans-oceanic shipments are in contradiction with national and international law. The report states that:

- The 4 ships now being hauled by tug contain 350 tons of PCBs, over 620 tons of asbestos and over 470 tons of old fuel oil.
- At least 2 domestic ship recycling firms in the USA offered to do the job for less money than AbleUK, the ship recycler in England that won the USA bid.
- The insurance levels demanded by the contract are dwarfed by the potential costs of clean-up operations should a major cataclysmic spill of oil occur.
- The risk assessment that was prepared for AbleUK admittedly did not consider that the ships were in bad physical condition.
- Tandem towing operations as are being conducted are forbidden in the US Navy and are not insurable within the US because of the high risks posed.
- 11 of the 13 ships due for export have been named as being among the list of 40 ships posing the largest environmental threat in the whole “ghost fleet”.
- Despite assurances and a contract stating that the ships will be dismantled in a dry-dock, there is in fact no dry-dock and the permits to construct the dry-dock do not yet exist, leaving a situation where the ships will likely have to be cut into over the water.

“International law requires an adequate facility capable of protecting human health and the environment,” said Jim Puckett of the Basel Action Network (BAN), now attending a meeting discussing the legal aspects of shipbreaking in Geneva. “It is hard to imagine how cutting into these PCB and asbestos laden hulks over water, without containment and adjacent to a marine sanctuary, can be considered adequate and protective. Even if these floating time-bombs make it across the Atlantic and up the English Channel without mishap, there’s a potential disaster waiting to happen in Teesside.”

The shipments were strongly condemned by Margot Wallstrom, European Commissioner, and Parliamentarians in the European Parliament on Monday. The commission will release a legal opinion in some weeks time. Meanwhile the Belgian Minister of Transport and Minister for the North Sea, have written letters of protest and concern to the United Kingdom and it has been confirmed by Belgian authorities that Belgium as a transit state, has never
received prior notification from the US as is required under international law.

Environmental groups are especially concerned about the precedent that will be set if the US is allowed to circumvent its own national law which bans the export of PCBs. They are particularly concerned with the keen interest the Bush administration has indicated to export the bulk of the "ghost fleet" to China where workers are paid very low wages and must toil without the social, legal, and medical safety-net U.S. or European workers enjoy.

"This export to the UK could give the Bush Administration a terrible precedent and first foot out the door to begin the wholesale dumping of this fleet of toxic ships on poor Asian communities," said Michael Childs of Friends of the Earth UK. “But whether it's the UK or China, we should not be throwing our toxic trash on our global neighbors. The USA has a dozen companies that are able to do the job safely, and with a minimum of risky transport. Why on earth are they sending this toxic trash to Europe?"

As the result of a lawsuit filed in Federal District Court in Washington DC by the Sierra Club, the Basel Action Network (BAN) and Earthjustice, the first four of the 13 vessels contracted to be disposed of by the Able UK company were permitted to be exported, while the remaining 9 were blocked by the presiding judge. Since the ruling, the US Maritime Administration has agreed not to export any more ships until at least April and in the meantime will prepare an environmental assessment. The first two vessels are expected to arrive in Teesside on November 5.

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For more information download the full report: Needless Risk: The Bush Administration's Scheme to Export Toxic Waste Ships to Europe at:
http://www.ban.org/Library/Needless%20Risk%20FinalA4.pdf

And visit the following websites:

www.impact-teesside.org/able1.htm
www.ban.org

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