

Rio Orinoco



On October 16, 1990, the *Rio Orinoco*, a 134-meter ocean-going tanker from Curaçao carrying 9,000 tons of liquid asphalt, was driven aground by 25 to 30-knot winds about five miles southwest of Port-Menier (Anticosti island) while on its way to Montreal.

The Canadian Coast Guard (CCG) was alerted at about 4:30 a.m. The ship's impact with the rocky sea bottom punctured at least one of its fuel tanks. Swept by high swells, the spill polluted several kilometers of shoreline before floating booms could be set up in a fruitless attempt to minimize the damage to the environment.



After foreign experts hired by the shipowner made two failed attempts to refloat the ship, the CCG decided to seize it in early December 1990 and oversee its refloating, which had to be postponed until spring due to increasingly dangerous sea conditions.

The CCG hired Transport Desgagnés (a subsidiary of Groupe Desgagnés) to monitor the ship. Throughout the winter, three-man teams worked in shifts to keep the pumps in working order. In early spring, the CCG issued a call for tenders to have the ship dislodged, but on a no cure, no pay basis. Transport Desgagnés won the \$3.2 million contract. Transport Desgagnés opted for the method posing the lowest risk to the environment.



After conducting a number of technical analyses, the Transport Desgagnés team determined that it would take about 55 days to refloat the ship. The technique used consisted first of heating the asphalt that had hardened and pumping it into another ship. The asphalt was immediately replaced by ballast water to keep the ship stabilized. The final step was to empty the water from the tanks. With the help of the spring tides and two tugboats, the ship was finally refloated and moved to Sept-Îles after being stuck in a remote spot on the Anticosti Reef for ten months.

The *Rio Orinoco* is now the property of Transport Desgagnés, which has invested heavily in its renovation. It now operates under the name of *Thalassa Desgagnés*.