



Mort Bouchard III, chief executive of Bouchard Transportation, refused to answer questions from TradeWinds about recent issues around his company Photo: Bouchard Transportation

Seafarers chase Bouchard Transportation for unpaid wages

Some seafarers are abandoning arrested Bouchard tugs, as a shipyard moves to sell one of its barges

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By [Matt Coyne](#)

Bouchard Transportation hasn't paid its seafarers since the new year, allegedly racking up a tab of more than \$3m as some languish on arrested ships and others risk criminal charges by going ashore.

According to a lawsuit filed in Manhattan federal court this week, the six seafarers listed as plaintiffs are owed a total of \$62,890, but say there are as many as 200 who have spent the first seven weeks of the year without a paycheck.

"This is the most egregious thing I've ever seen in my 30 years, what they're doing to these guys," said Paul Hofmann of New York-based Hofmann & Schweitzer.

"Some of these guys are captives. They can't get off these boats because the Coast Guard has indicated they may be subject to Coast Guard violations for abandoning the ship, not complying with the manning requirements."



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Others, the complaint said, have refused to report, knowing they would not be paid.

According to a copy of the port orders obtained by TradeWinds, at least three of Bouchard Transportation's tugs and one of its barges are being held at anchor, with dwindling food and water and increasing technical issues while crew members are threatened with felony charges should they abandon the ship.

The orders, two of which were sent on 29 January, one on 6 February and one on 8 February, have not been resolved, according to the Coast Guard.

"We make sure we're going out there daily and doing welfare checks with them and they have what they need while simultaneously working with partners to try and find a solution to this," said Lieutenant John Edwards of the Coast Guard's New Orleans-based 8th District.

That district covers both the ports of New Orleans and Corpus Christi, where the 1,763-gt Donna J Bouchard (built 2016) and 591-gt Barbara E Bouchard (built 1992) sit at anchor.

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Edwards said finding a safe berthing for these tugs is difficult, as some crew have deserted and any mechanism the Coast Guard can use to move the ships would only be a temporary solution.

The ships, he said, could pose a safety risk if they remain where they are.

“Really what’s going to need to happen is Bouchard is going to have to fund these vessels so they can find safe

berthing,” Edwards said.

Things get better, things get worse

Since last autumn – when Bouchard Transportation had safety documentation revoked for several of its vessels – the family-owned, Long Island-based firm has been the subject of a deluge of lawsuits, with no fewer than 20 alleging it owes a combined \$6m-plus in unpaid bills.

In a letter entered into one of the lawsuits, Bouchard chief executive Morton Bouchard III said the company had scaled back operations in October and that its future was at stake.

Bouchard disputed the validity of the letter, telling TradeWinds in December that it was never signed nor mailed and that it was illegally stolen from a company computer.



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In the letter, he also argued the Coast Guard and the American Bureau of Shipping, his vessels’ classification society, were trying to destroy the century-old company.

Bouchard Transportation appears to have settled some of the lawsuits, including eight filed by ExxonMobil totalling \$2.1m. In December settlement seemed to be reached in one of Martin Energy Services’ three suits and one of EN Bisso & Sons’.

Bouchard Transportation remains in talks with EN Bisso, according to court papers.

Elsewhere, Bouchard Transportation has not fared as well.

On Wednesday, attorneys for Bollinger Amelia Repair filed a motion to sell the Barge B No 240. It said Bouchard Transportation has not adequately responded to the lawsuit and that Bollinger should not have to bear the cost of berthing the vessel.

The shipyard is seeking \$1.1m for repair work performed, but only partially paid for.

“It appears that Bouchard is in a state of chaos and facing a myriad of problems on multiple fronts. That may be why it has taken so little interest in these proceedings and seemingly taken no steps to post security such that Barge B No 240 can be released,” read a filing.

“In such circumstances, a sale of the barge is the most prudent course of action.”

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The 1,763-gt Donna J Bouchard (built 2016) is being held in New Orleans after a lawsuit against its owner, Bouchard Transportation. Photo: T/Marine Traffic

A second letter

In a second, 11 February letter obtained by TradeWinds, Bouchard acknowledges his company is behind on payroll.



It is currently in "final negotiations" to raise the funds necessary to make payroll by the end of the month "or shortly thereafter," Bouchard said. "We would come with 5% interest."

"The last few weeks have been very difficult on you and your families," read the letter, this one signed by Bouchard. "It has been very difficult on me and my family as well. I am in no way taking any of this lightly, just the opposite."

Hofmann said he was aware such a letter had gone out.

Bouchard said he had "no comment" regarding the lawsuits, before abruptly hanging up before TradeWinds could ask any further questions.

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