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**PORT OF PALM BEACH RETURNS TO OPERATION AFTER WILMA**

**RIVIERA BEACH, Fla.** – Although sustaining damage preliminarily estimated at \$4.5 million, the Port of Palm Beach has resumed operations following Hurricane Wilma.

The port reopened to vessel and truck traffic Wednesday (Oct. 26) at 8 a.m., with vessel movements restricted to daylight hours and draft limited to 32 feet, Port of Palm Beach Executive Director Lori A. Baer said today. She said she is hopeful the restrictions may be removed by the weekend of Oct. 29-30.

The reopening occurred following authorization from the U.S. Coast Guard's captain of the port, after determination that navigation through the channel and slips was safe. Unrestricted reopening awaits completion of more extensive channel soundings.

Reopening also required demonstration that all port security was at full strength and that power was restored, thereby facilitating the ability to perform full security checks at port gates.

"We commend all of those, including Florida Power & Light, the Coast Guard and, in particular, our superb port staff professionals who played integral roles in getting the port back up and running within fewer than 48 hours," said Blair J. Ciklin, chairman of the Port of Palm Beach District Board of Commissioners. "FPL officials clearly recognized the importance of reopening the port and made power restoration to the port a priority.

"The port's speedy reopening was the result of considerable collaborative efforts on the part of the Coast Guard, the port's harbor pilots and port operations, maintenance and security personnel," Ciklin added. "Our tenant operators and their end-users are among those who depend upon our being able to return as rapidly as possible to operating status."

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U.S. Rep. E. Clay Shaw Jr., R-Fla., in whose district the port is located, quickly responded by sending staff members to the port to survey damages and offer assistance.

Within one hour of Wednesday's reopening, five Tropical Shipping cargo vessels, which had been waiting at anchor, headed to port berths to begin operations. Also, trucks resumed bringing in arriving cargo early Wednesday morning as well.

On the passenger side, the *Cloud X* ferry was scheduled to return this afternoon (Thursday, Oct. 27) and was expected to conduct its regular Friday (Oct. 28) sailing to Freeport in the Bahamas. The *Palm Beach Princess* is slated to resume day-cruise service Saturday (Oct. 29), following a previously scheduled 10 days of dry-dock in Nassau, while the *Big Easy*, which before the storm's arrival had taken refuge in Charleston, S.C., is expected to return Sunday (Oct. 30) and sail Monday (Oct. 31).

Baer said damages caused by Hurricane Wilma to port facilities were considerably greater than those sustained in the 2004 hurricanes. The eye of Wilma passed immediately north of the Port of Palm Beach the morning of Monday (Oct. 24).

Damage to port facilities included that to warehouses, roofs of various structures, a passenger loading bridge, a security gate and landscaping. Several objects, including a sailboat, became submerged and required extrication.

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