



"They solve problems before they happen."

WHAT'S A WHARFINGER?

Ask APM's Luke Leffingwell if he can imagine doing his job without the Port of Los Angeles wharfingers and he laughs. Then he gets serious and says, "It would be really hard for me to be effective without them."

As Facility Maintenance Manager for the busiest container terminal at the nation's #1 container port, Leffingwell contacts the Port's Wharfinger Division for help with anything from dock repairs to special events, such as APM's recent ribbon-cutting for its new solar-powered trash compactor. "The wharfingers are facilitators. When I have a question and don't know where to turn, they have the answer, he says. "And if they don't have the answer, they know where to find it."

Providing customers with the support and solutions they need to run their businesses is the job of the Port of L.A. wharfingers. They also collect revenues, enforce the tariff, manage lay berths and commercial fishing areas, process film permits, and resolve any manner of unexpected situations that surface almost daily.

"They're unbelievable," said Wilkin Mes, Regional Manager of Cruise Operations for Metro Cruise Services, which operates the Port of L.A.'s World Cruise Center. Mes often works with Port wharfingers to help television and film crews obtain required permits. "Whenever you ask for help, they always come through."

The division is headed by Chief Wharfinger Diane Boskovich, whose staff has lightning-fast recall of the Port's tariff and an encyclopedic command of lease agreements with container, oil, dry and break bulk terminals operators. They also have a photographic memory of the Port's layout and its 270 berths. "We're the 'Google' of the Port of Los Angeles," Boskovich says.

Boskovich runs the division – 24 wharfingers and support staff – with Assistant Chief Wharfingers Jennifer Mosher and Linda Vigil. Collectively, the trio has nearly a century of experience in helping terminal operators, shipping companies and others to do business at the Port.

The wharfingers' in-depth knowledge and quick response to terminal needs help customers such as West Basin Container Terminal (WBCT) save time and money. WBCT, which occupies one of the Port's oldest properties, has been fully operational while modernizing and expanding its facilities.

"The L.A. wharfingers play a vital role in the success of WBCT's operations and their quality of service is of the highest standard," says Alan Powell, Terminal Services Manager for WBCT, which handles cargo operations for China Shipping and Yang Ming among other major ocean carriers. "When we need a repair, they get support teams out right away." Last year, WBCT's expansion included adding four super post-Panamex cranes whose delivery the wharfingers helped coordinate.

"Wharfinger," a term that dates back nearly 500 years, refers to the operator or manager of a wharf. That definition only scratches the surface of what the L.A. wharfingers do.

"Assigning lay berths involves a lot more than finding the dockside equivalent of temporary parking for a vessel," says Boskovich. "We have to be precise. What size is the vessel? Does the customer need land space to discharge cargo? Do they need a clear path to transport it out of the area? Do streets need to be cleared or electrical wires lowered? Could other tenants be affected?"

Certainly, the responsibility for collecting revenues is vital but it is only half the job. The other half is verification – ensuring the money matches the cargo counts for all the automobiles; liquid, dry and break bulk commodities; cruise passengers and their provisions; and containers – 7,940,511 TEUs for 2011 -- that cross L.A. docks.

"We do 100 percent verification on all cargo and if there's a dispute we resolve it," Boskovich says. "The numbers have to be accurate for the Port and our customers. They also have to be reliable because they are leading economic indicators for the region and the nation."

Inside and out, the Port of L.A.s provide the expertise and "can do" attitude necessary to help customers and to keep things moving at the nation's largest cargo gateway. Hyun Jung "HJ" Yoon, General Manager of Finance for APM Terminals puts it all in perspective when he says, "They solve problems before they happen."