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## Barge to rise again -- maybe

*With ice gone, salvage attempts resume for vessel in Duluth Harbor*

**By Chuck Frederick**  
News Tribune staff writer



This time, they say, the barge at the bottom of the Duluth Harbor will pop back up to the surface.

"We're shooting at seeing it again," Lt. Cmdr. Andrew Palmiotto of the U.S. Coast Guard station in Duluth said last week. "Hopefully, it'll come up. 'Hope' is the important word in that sentence."

The privately owned dredge barge sank Nov. 3 after unexpectedly taking on water the day before. What caused the mishap is unclear. No one was injured. The barge was being used by Billington Contracting Inc. of Duluth to dredge shipping lanes under a contract with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

A month of diving and patching on the sunken vessel failed to bring it back up. When autumn turned to winter and the harbor turned to ice, recovery efforts were suspended.

Until last week. Six divers returned to the vessel to install fittings and equipment and to prepare it for another salvage attempt.

"Hopefully, by the end of the week," said diver Chad Scott of Krech, Ojard and Associates, which does underwater engineering inspection and investigation and has offices in Duluth, Superior, Virginia and East Lansing, Mich. Other

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divers are from Superior Special Services, a Fond du Lac, Wis., company with special equipment that allows divers to stay in frigid waters longer. Marine Tech Inc., a marine construction company in Duluth, is providing equipment.

"We're starting where we left off last year, basically," Scott said. "Mostly we're patching holes and then testing compartments to make sure they'll hold air."

Last year, air was pumped into the barge in an effort to make it float. Too much air escaped through holes, however, and the barge didn't budge.

About eight of the barge's 12 compartments will need to be airtight, Scott said. As of Friday afternoon, three compartments had been secured.

Another key to success this year, he said, is that water will be pumped out of the barge while air is pumped in.

"The two together all but guarantee it'll come up," Scott said. "I'm really confident it'll come up. We're trying to get the job done as fast as possible and as reasonably as possible for the insurance company."

Once back to the surface, the barge is expected to be towed to Fraser Shipyards in Superior for repairs. Owner Bob Billington hopes to find out then why the vessel sank.

"When this is all over, it'll be just like it was," Billington said. "We'll use it again. It'll be fine, unless they've cut a bunch of holes in it for their fittings. Then it'll need to be patched up, I guess."

**Chuck Frederick** is a community reporter. He can be reached weekdays at (218) 723-5316 or by e-mail at [cfrederick@duluthnews.com](mailto:cfrederick@duluthnews.com)

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