



# Docking Inland River Barges at Terminals





Inland river hopper barges traverse roughly 12,000 miles of navigable waterways in the United States river system. Each of these barges can handle 1,500-2,400 tons of material, the equivalent of 16 rail cars or 1,050 large semis/tractor trailers.

Barge damages, sinking and breakaways account for the most expensive losses at river terminals. Losses can easily exceed two million dollars and potentially more when considering the value of the barge and cargo, the subsequent damage to facilities, boats and other barges, as well as the cost to salvage the sunken barge. This guide provides information on how to mitigate risk at river terminals.

### Terminal Docks

River terminals are designed to handle numerous types of commodities and usually have dock facilities designed to hold barges while they are being loaded and unloaded, depending on river and tidal fluctuations. Terminals vary in size and can dock one to several barges at a time. Terminals may have their own vessels to move barges in or out of the dock area, known colloquially as spotting, dropping or shifting.

Terminal owners may also contract third-party fleet services that provide barge placement. An agreement should be made in the contract for tie-off scenarios that meet the requirements of the terminal. Trained terminal personnel should inspect the barge or barges docked at their facilities within 12 to 24 hours. All contracts should be reviewed by the appropriate attorneys for completeness and subrogation needs.

### Vessel Inspection Procedures

- Terminal deckhands should inspect whether the barges are secured with soft lines or wire rope and determine whether the terminal can move the barges up or down river using a winching system during loading and unloading.
- Barges should be loaded or unloaded in multiple passes over the length of the barge to minimize excess stresses mid-ship.
- Terminal deckhands should inspect the barge for recent steel damage on visible areas as well as all voids for ingress of water greater than the water draft on the outside of the vessel. When visible, covers and hopper plating should be inspected. All inspection findings should be reported to terminal management.
- Depending on the severity of the initial inspection, terminal management should contact the barge owner to engage a marine surveyor to assess and document the damage and remove the vessel from the dock as soon as practicable. Failure to do so may impose the liability for the damage upon the terminal operators.

To learn more about how to manage your risks and increase efficiencies, visit [cna.com/riskcontrol](https://cna.com/riskcontrol).