

The Port's "Fibs" vs Facts

We, like many of you, attended the Port's Public Presentations on the proposed expansion of the cold storage plant to the Governor Nicholls/Esplanade Wharfs. We understand the need to provide a location where cold storage can berth larger ships that cannot make it into the river entrance of the Industrial Canal. The Port's presentations led us to believe that this was the best location.

We believed the Port at first, but after careful fact checking we have discovered that the Port has not been honest with us:

Ammonia

Port "FIB" Ammonia gas is lighter than air and dissipates quickly in open spaces."²

FACT According to the report sponsored by the EPA¹, "The evaporation process cools the air so that a cold mixture of air and ammonia vapor is formed. **This mixture is denser than air**, and a heavy vapor dispersion model is required to adequately predict airborne concentrations downwind of the point of release." See attached toxic exposure map.

Port "FIB" NOCS Safety Record: In 122 years of operation there have been NO ammonia related injuries."
"It has never had an ammonia exposure that caused an injury or death."²

FACT To their credit there have been no ammonia related injuries that were reported but **they do admit to releases of ammonia**. One reported release was at their Nashville Ave. plant that caused the evacuation of the plant due to a ruptured pipe.

Port "FIB" "NOCS Safety Record: Annual mock Ammonia release drills along with several other safety training classes. & Reports are done daily, monthly and yearly in compliance with our RMP and PSM plans."

FACT Checking the Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality website, we uncovered the poor safety record of NOCS. Of the four locations that New Orleans Cold Storage has operated, 3 locations have been cited by the Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality for not following the law with respect to safety. The fourth location had an ammonia leak that evacuated the plant. The most consistent of the charges filed against them has been the failure to develop safety protocols including routine inspections of the equipment and train employees on the equipment and safety equipment.

Port “FIB”

“The refrigerated warehouse is set back 60 feet from the riverside edge of the wharf, which will create a safety buffer from river traffic.”²

FACT

The Port in its assessment is ignoring the physics of a boat running aground. As was the case in the 1996 Brightfield accident, the majority of the damage was caused by the force or shock wave created by the impact. The mechanical system of the refrigerator units that will contain the toxic ammonia must be made out of thick, rigid metal because of the corrosiveness nature of ammonia. The force of impact will bend the metal at its joints and other points causing ruptures and breaking seals. This would be a catastrophic event that no safety valves or measures can contain.

Traffic

Port “FIB”

“On a typical day, the warehouse will attract between 30 – 60 trucks. The absolute maximum is 100 trucks per day.”²

FACT

According to the Port, the new plant will have the capacity for 35 million lbs or 15,876 metric tons of products. An 18-wheeled truck holds approximately 18.2 metric tons of poultry. This equates to 872 18 wheelers to fill the plant.

A small ship that docked at the plant can hold 4500 tons of products. This equates to 247 truckloads. The port says it takes 3 days to fill a ship so that would be 83 trucks a day in comparison to the Port’s 30 – 60 trucks.

Add to the facts that there will be up to 3 ships berthed at the foot of Esplanade, and the ships this location is supposed to accommodate are the bigger ships (8000 tons) in comparison to the small ships (4500 tons) that can navigate to the Jourdan Road Plant. They are almost twice as big.

Therefore, if this operation is to run efficiently (at full capacity) it would require 498 18-wheeled trucks to service the plant on a daily basis.

This number only represents the trucks entering the plant. They will also need to leave the plant for a total of 996 trucks in and out of the neighborhood.

Port “FIB”

“Elysian Fields, the designated truck route that will be used, has sufficient capacity, and it is designed to handle heavy trucks.”²

FACT

Elysian Fields is only a State designated truck route from the freeways to the u-turn just past St. Claude Avenue according to the Louisiana Department of Transportation⁸. Trucks are to make the u-turn and continue down St. Claude Avenue.

Port “FIB” “Elysian Fields currently handles about 21,000 vehicles per weekday, and will experience an overall traffic increase of less than one-half of a percentage point.”²

FACT To date we have not received the full traffic study conducted by Urban Systems and commissioned by the Port. Therefore the number cannot be verified.

The Project and Process

Port “FIB” “It is a done deal.”

FACT The Port still needs to raise the other half of the money to make this site a reality. Additionally, the Port has yet to complete a Section 106 Review on the potential negative impacts of the development on the historic assets adjacent to the site such as the US Mint, a Louisiana State Museum, the French Market, and the Vieux Carre, Marigny, Bywater, Algiers and Treme National Historic Districts.

They will also need to apply for a conditional use permit through the City of New Orleans as this use according to the zoning for this area, Vieux Carre Park (VCP), is a conditional use and must be voted on by the City Council.

The Site Location

Port “FIB” This is the best location due to cost and time frame.

FACT The port considered 4 other locations for this expansion. They all were viable but according to them the other sites would cost to more and require longer to complete. The Port did not take into account the cost of this plant on our local tourist economy, which has a 3 fold larger economic impact than the cold storage industry, our health and safety and our historic districts. This was evidenced by their failure, even when pointed out, to include these impacts in their matrix.

The Port uses the fact that New Orleans Cold Storage is spending \$45,000/month to truck products to boats anchored at the river as reason for an expedient timeline. The reality is that the State is subsidizing them for this cost. Therefore, unless the State stops subsidizing them this the timeline issue is a moot point.

And even if the State did stop subsidizing this cost, New Orleans Cold Storage, like any other business, could pass this cost along to the consumer as most companies did with the higher oil prices.

Port “FIB” New Orleans Cold Storage cannot afford to pay \$45,000 a month indefinitely.

FACT The State is already subsidizing this cost. If you calculate the amount paid yearly, which is \$540,000 and divide that into the cost of the plant which is estimated at \$45 million. **The State could subsidize the plant for 83 years** while they prepare a location that is better suited for this type of industrial processing.

Port “FIB” “The Perry Street Wharf is not long enough for three ships to dock at the same time.”⁶

FACT According to the Port the third ship that will be berthed there is for overflow. Overflow ships can be berthed all along the river until they are ready for them so a wharf with three berthing spots is not needed.

Other Issues Not Addressed by the Port

Air Pollution

FACT The increase in 18 wheeled-truck traffic will introduce a significant increase in pollution. Add to this the fact that these refrigerated trucks must remain on to keep their cargo cool. This is the same for the large cargo ships that berth at the foot of Esplanade. This is a greater impact than what is currently there now as trucks and ships turn off their engines once they are parked/docked.

1. Model Risk Management Program and Plan for Ammonia Refrigeration, May 16, 1996, Science Applications International Corporation, Reston VA
2. Myth vs Reality, Port of New Orleans
3. Board of Commissioners of the Port of New Orleans, Investing in Louisiana’s Future: Riverfront Cold Storage Project, September 2008
4. Board of Commissioners of the Port of New Orleans, Investing in Louisiana’s Future: Riverfront Cold Storage Project Public Meeting #2, December 11, 2008
5. New Orleans Cold Storage Safety Record
6. Notes from Board of Commissioners of the Port of New Orleans, Investing in Louisiana’s Future: Riverfront Cold Storage Project, September 2008
7. Notes from Board of Commissioners of the Port of New Orleans, Investing in Louisiana’s Future: Riverfront Cold Storage Project Public Meeting #2, December 11, 2008
8. LADOTD Control-Section Manual, As of 4/27/2009