

Report details project's hazards

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The U.S. Coast Guard and the U.S. Maritime Administration have identified several potential hazards of the proposed Port Dolphin Energy Liquefied Natural Gas Deepwater Port in its newly-released Draft Environmental Impact Statement.

Among the concerns are spills, explosions, increased water and air pollution and impacts on marine life, including fish, manatees, dolphins, whales and sea turtles.

Public comments will be accepted on the statement until June 2. A final version of the statement is due in mid-July, followed by a final public hearing later this summer.

Spills

In its two-volume statement, the Coast Guard identifies 11 potential scenarios in which liquid natural gas might accidentally be released into the environment: vessel collision, shipboard mechanical system failure, fire, gas release at processing equipment, severe weather, structural failure of the vessel, grounding, natural phenomena, mooring system failure, dropped objects and aviation accident.

Intentional attacks also were considered.

The worst industry accident listed in the report was in 1944 in Cleveland, where 128 people died after liquid natural gas leaked from a tank and formed a vapor cloud that surrounded streets and the storm sewer system, then ignited.

In 1973, 37 people died in Staten Island when the interior of an empty natural gas storage tank caught fire during repairs.

The most recent incident was in 2002, when a ship carrying liquid natural gas collided with a U.S. Navy nuclear-powered submarine, the U.S.S. Oklahoma City, causing a leak in the ship's hull, but no injuries or deaths.

Overall, the report ranked liquid natural gas shipping as relatively safe.

"During the past 45 years, there have been approximately 100,000 liquid natural gas carrier voyages covering more

than 235 million miles. There is no report of any accident involving a liquid natural gas carrier underway that has resulted in an unintentional release of liquid natural gas cargo. Over the life of the industry, 16 cargo transfer incidents worldwide have resulted in limited gas spills with some damage, but no cargo fires have occurred."

A spill of the supercooled liquid natural gas could freeze marine life in the water, but since liquid natural gas does not dissolve in water, the time frame would be limited to the period before the gas was boiled off, according to the statement.

Spills also could kill sea grass, which fish, manatees and sea turtles feed on.

Explosions

"The industry is not without incidents, but it has maintained an enviable safety record," according to the statement. "Vapors are flammable only in concentrations of 5 to 15 percent natural gas when mixed with air. Liquid natural gas is neither flammable nor explosive. Natural gas will not explode in an unconfined environment."

Water quality

"A combination of long- and short-term minor adverse impacts on water quality would be expected" due to sediment being stirred up during installation and operation of the port, according to the statement.

"During operations, cooling and ballast water discharges would have several impacts on water quality near the port, including increased water temperature, increased turbidity and decreased dissolved oxygen content. Spills of hazardous substances, such as hydrocarbons (e.g. petroleum, oils and lubricants), might result in short-term, minor adverse impacts on water quality."

Air quality

"Short-term direct minor adverse impacts on air quality would be expected" from equipment during construction.

Emissions from ongoing port operations would have a "long-term direct minor adverse

impact on air quality during the life of the project."

The product itself poses risks, too. "Since natural gas is a fossil fuel, combustion of natural gas contributes to the generation of greenhouse gasses."

Marine life

"Minor to moderate short-term adverse impacts and minor long-term adverse impacts on biological resources could occur as a result of the project," including impacts on vegetation, wetlands and marine organisms.

A system that would take Gulf of Mexico water into the ship for cooling and expel hot water would adversely affect plankton, and could cause "direct, adverse, minor impacts on biological resources from the impingement or entrainment of marine organisms," including gag grouper.

In addition, 234 acres of bottom-dwelling benthic communities would experience "minor to moderate short-term and long-term adverse impacts" during construction.

"Benthic communities would be expected to recover quickly by recolonization from surrounding communities of similar organisms," according to the statement, but 66 acres of benthic substrata would be lost permanently.

The endangered smalltooth sawfish also could be affected.

Manatees

"Increases in vessel traffic could increase the potential for collisions with federally listed marine mammals, thereby increasing the occurrence of serious injuries or mortality. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has consistently concluded that a 'take' of a single manatee would jeopardize the continued existence of the species, and vessel collisions have been identified as a major source of mortality for this species."

Dolphins

The dolphins that the port is named for are listed as potentially impacted by collision, noise, entanglement and water turbidity as result of

Port may impact imperiled land animals

A number of threatened and endangered land-based species listed in the federal Endangered Species Act and the National Environmental Policy Act may live along the four-mile corridor where Port Dolphin proposes to build the onshore portion of its pipeline at Port Manatee, according to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

The agency recommends that Port Dolphin conduct surveys to determine the presence or absence of the endangered wood stork, *Mycteria americana*; the threatened Florida scrub-jay, *Aphelocoma coerulescens*; and the threatened Eastern indigo snake, *Dymarchon corais couperi*.

Species living within nesting areas or core foraging areas are of special concern, which could extend 15 miles in the case of an active wood stork nesting colony, according to Field Supervisor David Hankla.

ManaSota-88 sounds alarm

Some of the environmental impacts listed in the U.S. Coast Guard's Draft Environmental Impact Statement were predicted by environmental watchdog group ManaSota-88, which was among the first to direct attention to the port proposal last summer.

"I don't think it's as safe a procedure as the company is putting forward," said Glenn Compton of ManaSota-88, who appeared at a May 6 public hearing to ask questions about the project.

"We have more questions than comments," he told the panel. "Is there an alternative site study? A needs analysis? A plan for mitigation of the benthic habitat? What's the success rate of the company in mitigation of marine habitats?"

"My concern was the amount of benthic habitat that would be disrupted by the pipeline - 234 acres would be temporarily impacted and 66 acres would be permanently impacted," Compton said later. "This is some of the most difficult habitat to mitigate, so we have some concerns that it would affect the juvenile fish habitat near Port Manatee."

Spills and explosions also are of concern.

"I don't know the risks of a spill, but it's not a gas that's going to evaporate," he said. "Anytime you have a liquid petroleum product, it can spill. And heating it to turn it into vapor poses an explosion possibility."

DEP to weigh in soon

The Florida Department of Environmental Protection is reviewing the Coast Guard's environmental report and will submit written comments by June 2, DEP Deputy Press Secretary Dee Ann Miller said.

Potential environmental concerns could include impacts to marine sea floor habitats, sea grasses and wetlands, pumping seawater for vessel engine cooling and its effects on fisheries, air emissions and limited right-of-way space at

Port Manatee, she said.

Port Dolphin has not yet submitted an application for a state environmental resource permit, which also requires approval by the governor and cabinet, she added.

Public comments invited before June 2

Comments on the proposed Port Dolphin project should be sent to the Federal Docket Management Facility before June 2 by one of the following methods:

- Mail or delivery to the Federal Docket Management Facility, Department of Transportation, West Building Ground Floor, Room W12-140, 1200 New Jersey Ave. S.E., Washington, D.C. 20590
- Phone: 202-366-9329
- Fax: 202-493-2251
- E-mail from Web-site: www.regulations.gov. Enter USCG-2007-28532 in the search field, then click on "send a comment or submission."

Submissions should include name, address and docket number USCG-2007-28532.

Faxed or hand-delivered submissions must be unbound, no larger than 8 1/2 by 11 inches and suitable for copying and electronic scanning.

All submissions will be posted without changes at www.regulations.gov and will include all personal information provided.

Contact your representatives

- Gov. Charlie Crist - 850-488-5394; email Charlie.Crist@MyFlorida.com
- U.S. Sen. Mel Martinez - toll free 866-630-7106; email from website: martinez.senate.gov/public
- U.S. Sen. Bill Nelson - 202-224-5274; email from website: billnelson.senate.gov/contact/email.cfm
- U.S. Rep. Vern Buchanan - 951-6643; email from website: buchanan.house.gov/contact.shtml
- State Sen. Mike Bennett - 727-6349; email bennett.mike.web@flsenate.gov
- State Rep. Bill Galvano - 708-4968; email from website: www.myfloridahouse.gov
- Manatee County Commissioner Carol Whitmore - 745-3700; email carol.whitmore@mymanatee.org
- Manatee County Commissioner Jane von Hahmann - 745-3700; email jane.vonhahmann@mymanatee.org