

Cabrillo Port Sails Past Detailed Security Assessment Required for Other LNG Projects

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A quirk in federal laws will send Cabrillo Port out for a vote from federal and state regulators in a few weeks without the highest-detail level of assessment of its security, public safety and firefighting demands, a Coast Guard official said Tuesday.

The controversy over safety for liquefied natural gas operations comes as a New York congressman is charging that the Coast Guard may not be able to handle its existing mission, much less the added burdens of a fleet of new offshore LNG terminals.

A detailed study, called a "waterways suitability assessment," found that the Coast Guard would need another ship and at least 48 more people to properly protect Broadwater, a proposed floating regasification and storage unit in Long Island Sound, New York. This planned LNG ship is similar in function and design to the proposed Cabrillo Port floating LNG terminal near Malibu.

Although the Coast Guard was required to prepare and release a precise and detailed security analysis for the LNG terminal proposed for New York, as well as one proposed for Oregon, no similar waterways suitability analysis is required under the different set of federal laws that cover BHP Billiton's Cabrillo Port LNG project proposed for Malibu waters, said Coast Guard Cmdr. Mark Prescott.

A Coast Guard official said the agency will not perform a detailed suitability analysis of Cabrillo Port security and firefighting needs, including the demands to be placed on local public safety agencies, until after the plant gets its federal license.

"We certainly did a very robust analysis for the environmental impact report's risk assessment," Prescott said in a telephone interview Tuesday. But that study, he acknowledged, was considerably-less detailed than the Long Island Sound assessment last December.

"Whether the sector commander out here is going to have to have additional boats or guardsmen on duty out here is something we will determine after they (BHP Billiton) have a license," Prescott said. "That is when we will be working with the sector commander to come up with exact requirements.

The existing Cabrillo Port EIR has several partially and totally blacked-out pages in its security assessment, and is not nearly as detailed as the Broadwater analysis. The Cabrillo EIR was heavily criticized last year, the newest version will be released in a few weeks, officials say.

Because Broadwater would sit within State of New York waters, the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission is in charge of it, and federal law requires a detailed Coast Guard assessment. But Cabrillo Port sits outside California waters, in Coast Guard jurisdiction, and the federal laws do not

require the Coast Guard to conduct the same level of detailed security assessment that the very same agency had to provide to federal, New York and Connecticut officials.

"That's just incredible," sputtered Susan Jordan, director of the California Coastal Protection Network, when told of the differing Coast Guard plans. "California gets discriminated against? Where is the logic in that?"

"You can't say 'we'll tell the people if and how we can protect them' after you grant the license," she said. "They can't be serious."

Malibu city council member Andy Stern, a frequently vocal LNG opponent, was incredulous. "It's one more in a series of outrageous actions that the federal government has made in total disregard for the health and safety of the residents of Oxnard and Malibu and Los Angeles County.

The Broadwater report is a detailed, 168-page study that specifically spells out how many additional Coast Guard crew, officers and ships will be needed to guard the LNG terminal and the LNG carriers that will unload there. It also says the company does not have responsibility to help the Coast Guard or local governments pay for additional patrol and fire vessels that would be needed.

But the report says the Coast Guard "currently does not have the resources required to implement the measures that

have been identified as being necessary to effectively manage the potential risk to navigation safety and maritime security associated with the Broadwater Energy proposal."

The report says the Coast Guard would be faced with "either curtailing current activities within the Sector, reassigning resources from outside of the Sector, or for the Coast Guard to seek additional resources through the budget process."

More than 40 LNG terminals have been proposed along the nation's coasts, and the Coast Guard would bear the brunt of preventing terrorism or accidents at all of them. Although no terrorist has ever struck an LNG carrier, some security experts says the ships are likely targets as they carry more combustible energy than a small nuclear bomb.

A spokesman for BHP Billiton did not have any reaction to the matter.

Congressman Tim Bishop, D-N.Y., has demanded hearings into the Coast Guard's ability to protect floating LNG terminals in New England and the California coasts.

Bishop represents an area along Long Island Sound where Broadwater would be anchored. The New England LNG terminal is attracting similar controversy to Cabrillo, with the region's Congressional delegation uniformly lined up to oppose the energy import and storage ship.

"There are many unanswered questions about what impact Broadwater and similar projects will have on the Coast Guard's limited resources," Bishop said. "As a member of the Coast Guard's oversight committee, I want answers."

Nationally, the Coast Guard has been hard-pressed to meet existing service goals due to a modernization program that has had disastrous results.

Plans to remodel and lengthen several Coast Guard cutters have resulted in hull cracks that have made some cutters unsafe and unusable, and there are also major problems with a new fleet of Coast Guard helicopters.

**Photo: (picture shows the Cabrillo Port DEIR, with two pages entirely blacked out)
Caption: REDACTIONS-Whole pages that address security issues are blacked out in the Revised Draft Environmental Impact Report. Credit: Hans Laetz / MSN**