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Port of Baltimore goes green

Shippers and terminal take steps to clean up air, water and soil

By Lorraine Mirabella, The Baltimore Sun

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The port of Baltimore, long a source of pollution from ships, trucks and heavy equipment, is starting to clean up.

While port businesses and environmentalists often clashed in the past, terminal operators and marine businesses say they are stepping up efforts to minimize the harmful effects of port operations on the air, water and soil. They are working to make everything from cranes to yard equipment to warehouse lighting more efficient and environmentally friendly.

"The port is becoming the last line of defense in keeping stuff out of the bay," said Richard L. Sheckells Jr., chief of environmental initiatives for the Maryland Port Administration.

Port officials have installed screens in storm drains to keep pollutants out of the Chesapeake Bay, removed underground fuel tanks and used a federal grant to help businesses install clean diesel technology in 142 pieces of equipment. Tugboats with McAllister Towing, one of the port's main tug companies, run on slower speeds to burn less fuel.

Ports America Chesapeake, which operates Seagirt Marine Terminal for the state, recycles its used oil, batteries and scrap metal, and has installed new diesel engines in more than half of the 122 yard trucks to reduce emissions.

And Wallenius Wilhelmsen Logistics, or WWL, a Scandinavian line that ships and processes automobiles and farm equipment at Dundalk Marine Terminal, is taking steps to eventually operate zero-emissions marine terminals in Baltimore and elsewhere.

Much of the greening of the port is driven by increasingly stringent environmental regulations, but port operators also recognize that what's good for the environment is also good for business, said Michael Derby, Canton-based general manager for North Atlantic operations and ocean, terminal and environmental affairs for WWL.

"Frankly, we recognize that everyone's operation, ours included, has an impact on the environment and we're taking steps to minimize that," Derby said. He added: "There are regulations coming in the near future on the vessel side which will add costs if we don't come up with new ways to work."

The company already uses electric and hybrid diesel-electric yard vehicles and recycles water in its car wash, where it processes vehicles being shipped from overseas manufacturers. In time, the company hopes to operate zero-emission terminals worldwide. It is promoting its zero-emission concept called the "Castor Green Terminal," named for a species of endangered beaver.

The green terminals would run on solar or wind power, use fuel-cell or electric-powered equipment and recycle its waste. They also would handle ocean cargo close to the water

in compact, efficient structures topped by greenhouses and solar panels. The terminal buildings would be compact, to reduce land use, and be built from recyclable materials when possible.

WWL is studying best environmental practices at its 40 facilities around the globe in hopes of identifying possible sites and launching a pilot project within the next 10 years. Baltimore is a candidate site for a green terminal.

"We have an ambition in our industry to be an environmental forerunner" and to influence the rest of the industry, Derby said. "When we talk globally about the concept, we do talk about Baltimore as one of our successes. Baltimore is also an extremely important port for us. It's a real hub with the cargo coming through here."

The company hopes to start building at least one, if not several, pilot zero-emissions terminals by 2020, Derby said, adding that WWL has had "positive discussions" with state port and economic development officials.

Environmental initiatives at the port are key to the overall sustainability of the industry, Sheckells said.

"Sustainability means how do you sustain an industry economically, socially and environmentally, and how do you make decisions to produce a better economic and social and environmental outcome," he said.

To help manage the various initiatives in areas such as storm-water management and air and water quality management, the port administration has put a formal environmental management system in place.

Last year, the state began distributing part of a \$3.5 million federal grant from the Environmental Protection Agency to help clean the air.

One of the recipients of grant money has been Ports America, which has a companywide goal of reducing energy consumption by at least 10 percent a year. Ports America was able to use grant money to retrofit forklifts and replace the engines in yard trucks, which now automatically turn off if a truck idles for more than 10 minutes.

Jenn Aiosa, Maryland senior scientist for the Chesapeake Bay Foundation, applauded the green efforts by port officials and businesses. The port has become more willing over the past decade to work with environmentalists, community members and other stakeholders to find ways to lessen the port's impact on the environment, she said.

She noted that progress has been most evident in the state's dredging program, as the port has strived to find better ways to dispose of sediment containing contaminants, including using silt to help create wetlands.

"In the late '90s and early 2000s, there was not a very robust back-and-forth discussion on what is the most environmentally sensitive way to deal with that material," Aiosa said.

The port also struggles with poor air quality, she said.

"Every opportunity that can be taken to make some of those [emissions] reductions or to look at new programs is a good thing," Aiosa said. "In that regard, it's positive that the port is taking a leadership role in looking at opportunities for where they might be able to make those changes."