

The Important Role of Voluntary Efforts and Partnerships in Port Sustainability – a New Orleans Perspective

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The Port of New Orleans is working to shift the discussion from ports as sources of pollution, to ports as generators of solutions that engage not just the maritime industry and freight stakeholders, but the communities we border and the workers that make their living at the Port.



Image credit: Tracie Morris Schaefer, courtesy of the Port of New Orleans

Most recently, our Port was recognized in the Green Marine certification program for making the commitment to improve environmental performance. Our efforts to date include creating an environmental management program that has made major strides in just two years, in large part due to working with partners to search for solutions. From launching the first public fleet of electric vehicles in the state to engaging our stakeholders in strategies for trash free waters, we are moving quickly to capture momentum from across Greater New Orleans and the global shipping industry for much-needed environmental progress.

Working to demonstrate environmental, economic, and community benefits

Ports are like cities in their own right – comprised of facilities, infrastructure, the private sector, and public goods, as well as the resources needed to maximize commerce. Some 150 public port authorities in the U.S. handle more than 2 billion tons of domestic and import/export cargo annually – and by 2020 waterborne commerce is expected to double from 2001 levels. As the intermodal transport hub on the largest watershed in the nation, the Port of New Orleans' cargo activities serve 60 percent of the consumers in the U.S. and generate \$17 billion in spending in Louisiana alone. The Port of New Orleans generates 160,000 direct and indirect jobs statewide. And along the Gulf Coast, ports provide almost 750,000 jobs directly related to port activities.

In large port cities, not only do ports exist along some of the most prime waterfront real estate, ports are the gatekeepers to this sensitive environment. We can use this asset to educate and influence port operators, customers, and tenants to be better stewards of the environment we represent, such as through stormwater management practices or air quality improvements. When it comes to pollution prevention, port authorities may not directly regulate the environmental performance of goods movement, but we do have a critical role to play in convening, influencing, and educating those stakeholders and partners toward more sustainable growth and progress.

Why partnerships matter

We are not working in isolation – many of our efforts have been aided by other ports along the Gulf Coast and across North America that are tackling the same challenges, through organizations like the American Association of Port Authorities, as well as organizations like Environmental Defense Fund, which are interested in partnering with the maritime industry to further environmental progress. We are also engaged with the federal government as a representative on the U.S. EPA Ports Work Group to help define, create, and implement a national program to improve air quality at U.S. ports.

As we move forward into the next two years, and as our Port works to reshape our path forward with a new Master Plan for growth and development, we can count on more involvement from our stakeholders and the community, and a more sustainable future for our waterways and New Orleans.

