

Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) is natural gas that has been condensed to liquid form by cooling it at -260° Fahrenheit. At this temperature, LNG is 1/600th of its original volume, and can be transported by sea. Most LNG is shipped to the western hemisphere from Russia and the Middle East, but there are also some sources located in Trinidad & Tobago.

Here in the US, LNG is unloaded from large tankers at offshore or onshore facilities where it is stored and eventually warmed and converted back to natural gas. The natural gas is then sent through pipelines for distribution to businesses and homeowners.

There are currently six LNG facilities in operation along the Atlantic Coast and Gulf of Mexico, but there are over 40 more facilities proposed in the US that are either waiting to be constructed or are pending review. The map of the proposed facilities doesn't seem to reveal any strategic planning or attempt to match market demand with supply, but does show frighteningly dense proposals along the Northeast Atlantic and Gulf coasts.

So, why so many new proposals?

While the oil companies have tried to feed the public misconception that LNG can alleviate high fuel prices at the pump, this is simply not true. LNG is not gasoline. It is not a clean fuel. LNG is from foreign sources and is more polluting and expensive than domestic natural gas. It is actually nearly as dirty as coal once you consider the energy that is spent processing and transporting this fuel.

Recent market studies also show that we do not need these foreign sources of natural gas. The United States has enough domestic sources to last for at least two generations. In fact, existing LNG terminals are only using about 10% of their existing capacity, and a recent Wall Street Journal article noted that the ever expanding storage capacity created by newer facilities is likely to make the U.S. "a dumping ground for the world's excess natural gas". (Russell Gold, "Bad Call: The Conventional Wisdom Said that the U.S. Would Soon Become a Big Importer of Natural Gas. The Conventional Wisdom Blew It," WSJ, 9 Feb 09)

Rather than acting upon market demand, it is likely that the oil companies were trying to get as many proposals as possible pushed through while there was a friendly administration in power, as the licensing of LNG facilities falls under the purview of the federal government. The Federal Energy

Regulatory Commission (FERC) has authority over onshore facilities and those proposed in state waters, less than three miles from shore. In **federal waters**, the Maritime Administration (MARAD) and the U.S. Coast Guard have siting and permitting jurisdiction.

State agencies are also participants in the LNG permitting process through the Coastal Zone Management Act, the Clean Air Act, the Clean Water Act and National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) review. State and local agencies with public land stewardship responsibilities also retain their authority to review and approve land lease applications.

Concerns over the safety of these facilities, plus numerous environmental concerns, have created extensive controversy in the regions where plans have been proposed. With three facilities proposed in the NY/NJ Harbor area, the NYC Surfrider Chapter has been working hard to educate the public and their local officials about the true dangers of LNG. Along with the Central Long Island Chapter, they had a big presence at recent public hearings in Long Beach and Rockaway Beach, New York. These hearings were for the Atlantic Sea Island Group's proposal to build a massive new facility, Safe Harbor Energy, including the unprecedented construction of an offshore artificial island covering 116 acres of the sea floor and an extensive piping system connecting it to the mainland.

The Surfrider chapters in the northeast are not alone in this fight. They share the same concerns with numerous other environmental and civic groups throughout the NY metropolitan area. One commonly used technology for re-gasification of LNG uses a continuous uptake of water that screens out and kills fish and other marine life and discharges chlorinated seawater back into the environment. The installation of new pipelines and moorings disturb large areas of sea bottom habitat. There is a potential for gas spills or fires to impact water quality and marine life, and the LNG facilities and tankers contribute to local air and light pollution.

If these environmental concerns weren't enough, LNG facilities pose obvious safety and security threats; they aren't pretty to look at from the beach; and they severely impair the public's ability to access coastal waters that should be available for boating, fishing and other recreational uses. The Coast Guard will be requiring large buffers, or no-go zones, around any new offshore LNG facilities and tankers.

Many environmental groups are

LNG Coming to a Beach Near You?

By Mara Dias & Rick Wilson



Liquid Natural Gas tanker.

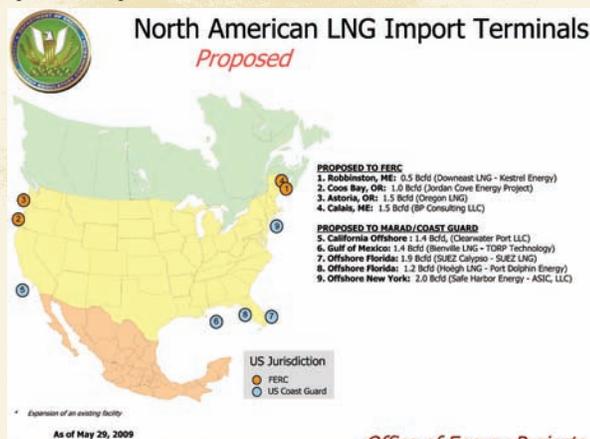
also opposed to the fuel itself, noting first, that the large scale of importation facilities will always have a pronounced impact on the marine environments where they are sited, and second, that the liquifaction process makes LNG an extremely dirty fuel with a carbon footprint roughly equivalent to coal. At a minimum, environmental groups like the New Jersey based Clean Ocean Action, have recommended that an assessment be performed to estimate the future need for LNG facilities nationally and/or in a given state or area before new facilities are permitted. Along with that, criteria should be developed for siting and for the technologies associated with the LNG facilities. All this should be part of a coherent national energy policy that considers the need to move away from carbon-based fuels in place of renewable and non-polluting energy sources.

If you live in a coastal state, there is a good chance that there is an LNG proposal brewing somewhere near you. We recommend that you become educated on the proposal and the potential impacts that it could have on your community.

The Coastal A-Z article posted on Surfrider's Web site at: www.surfrider.org/a-z/LNG.php is a good place to start. The New York City Chapter has a fact sheet on LNG posted on their Web site at: www.surfrider.org/myc/pdf/TriFoldxLNG_Final.pdf and the market study mentioned in this article can be found on Clean

Ocean Action's Web site at www.cleanoceanaction.org

Mara is Surfrider Foundation's Water Quality Coordinator and Rick is our Coastal Management Coordinator.



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