

Superior TELEGRAM

Officials rally at Milwaukee port before ballast water permit hearing

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MILWAUKEE -- Wisconsin's proposal on ballast water permits is the equivalent of putting out a business not welcome sign on at the state's ports, according to officials gathered today to object to the proposal during a public hearing sponsored by the Department of Natural Resources.

Wisconsin will lose jobs, increase manufacturing costs and stifle economic development if a proposed statewide permit regarding ballast water is approved in its current form, a group of business leaders, labor representatives and elected officials, warned today.

"We have the worst economy in decades, and Wisconsin's unemployment just skyrocketed to nearly 9 percent," said Superior Mayor Dave Ross. "Thousands of people are losing jobs, and businesses are struggling. This is absolutely the worst time to enact a proposal that isolates Wisconsin, kills jobs and hurts our ports. We are foolish to tell the international shipping community to go somewhere else."

Steve Fisher, executive director of the American Great Lakes Association indicated that Wisconsin's three major ports would in essence be cutting themselves off from international trade and important agricultural exports if they are forced to follow the proposed permit for their ports.

Milwaukee, Green Bay and Superior, the largest of Wisconsin's major ports, would in essence be cut off from international trade and agricultural exports if forced to follow the proposed, Fisher said.

He pointed out that Minnesota, Illinois, Indiana, Ohio and Pennsylvania have all adopted the same standards for ballast treatment, but enacting a different standard for Wisconsin would be like putting up a "jobs not welcome" sign.

The proposed statewide permit would apply to ocean-going vessels, which would mean those ships would avoid Wisconsin's ports and do their business elsewhere on the Great Lakes.

"Port officials in Duluth have already said ships that skip Wisconsin will go to Chicago, Duluth or somewhere in Indiana, making Wisconsin ports much less competitive," said Eric Reinelt, Director of the Port of Milwaukee. "We support tough regulation for ballast discharge permits, but this proposal with unrealistic goals doesn't make good economic sense and can't be achieved with available technology."

Superior, which shares a port with Duluth, would face much more stringent standards sooner than Minnesota requires, but the technology to achieve even the Minnesota standard is not available.

The speakers made their comments at a news conference Monday morning at the Port of Milwaukee before a public hearing on the matter. News conference attendees included Ross, Port of Milwaukee Director Eric Reinelt; Milwaukee customs broker M.E. Dey & Co., Inc.; the International Longshoremen's Association, Local 815; and the International Union of Operating Engineers, Local 139. Representatives of the three Wisconsin ports, labor officials, businesses and others planned to attend the hearing and/or submit comments opposing the proposal.

The proposed DNR permit to regulate ballast water discharges in the Great Lakes would establish standards for Wisconsin that are 100 times more stringent than those proposed by the International Maritime Organization and adopted by the other Great Lakes states. Wisconsin also has greatly accelerated its effective date to 2012, while the other states have adopted a 2016 implementation date.

"These standards need to be consistent with our neighboring states and competing ports. Without changes, Milwaukee, Green Bay and Superior will lose jobs, increase manufacturing costs and stifle economic development," said Tom Schwark, executive board trustee with The International Longshoremen's Association, Local 815.

Fisher said without commercially viable technology available to meet the proposed standards regulators had "gone overboard in their zeal to do good and will instead end up doing the wrong thing. This unworkable standard is anti-jobs."

For more information on why the DNR proposal needs to be changed, please go to www.wisjobsandports.org.