



WINDMILL PARTS BOUND FOR MANY PLACES

The Facts : August 03, 2007

Windmill parts bound for many places

By John Lowman
The Facts

Published August 03, 2007

FREEPORT — Port Freeport is the first U.S. stop for hundreds of megawatts of potential power.

As a spring agreement between the port, importer Reliance Bulk Carriers of Houston and manufacturer Suzlon Energy of India continues to mature, ships carrying windmill parts are unloaded at a 15-acre site at the port. The massive parts — too large for rail transport — are taken one piece at a time by truck to points around the country for assembly, said Port Operations Director Al Durel.

When constructed at final windfarm destinations of West Texas, Montana, Minnesota, Iowa or various other areas, the wind-driven turbines stand about 200 feet high and weigh more than 200 tons. Each is capable of generating 2.2 megawatts of power, or enough electricity to power 60 average-sized homes, Durel said.

“They’re fuel-free, environmentally friendly, power-generating pieces of equipment,” Durel said. “As long as the wind is blowing, they’re generating electricity.”

There wasn’t much wind Wednesday as port workers examined parts, stored in large stacks on a limestone-paved lot. From import to site-construction, the windmills passing through the port will lead to about 150 jobs per unit once in place, Durel said.

Some of those jobs are held locally, said Port Managing Director Phyllis Saathoff.

On the ground, the windmills lie in seven or eight parts, depending whether the final product has two or three blades. Towers come in three 65-foot sections weighing 30 tons each. Blades, about 160 feet long, weigh 3 tons each and the nacell, or generator, weighs 80 tons. Each unit also has a hub to which blades are attached with as many as 60 large bolts.

“It’s a monster when it’s put together,” Durel said. “Seeing the parts on the ground doesn’t give you a feel for how big they are.”

The exterior of all unit parts are built of a white composite material made to withstand weather, Durel said. An average windmill can be in service 20 to 25 years.

“You may have to do some preventative maintenance from time to time, but they’re built to be pretty durable,” he said. “This is another way for us to help economic development of the entire United States. Windmills are a clean source of power and help decrease our dependence on foreign oil.”

Texas is the top windmill-using state in the union, and Suzlon the fifth-leading manufacturer of wind turbines in the world. This spring, RBC paid \$35,000 in advance to begin storing the parts and the lease eventually could gross the port \$6 million.

The partnership is a continuing positive step toward port growth, Saathoff said.

“It’s a good fit for us,” she said. “We had the available acreage and berth. It’s a long-term contract and could be a good revenue stream. It diversifies commodities at the port and it’s exciting to play a role in the nation’s efforts to produce clean energy.”

Giant curved blades are a “new generation” and are designed to capture as much wind as possible, said port Security Site Manager Ben Westerlin.

“They can produce a whole lot more power than the ones they used to use,” Westerlin said. “They’re also quite a bit larger.”

In April, the first ship brought components for more than 20 windmills, and six other vessels have transported parts since then. Plans are to expand the windmill storage area to 30 acres, Saathoff said.

John Lowman covers industry for The Facts. Contact him at (979) 237-0151.

Copyright © 2007 The Facts