

SEA FOG: AN UNEXPECTED STRAW ON THE BACK OF INTERNATIONAL SHIPPING

The Port of Houston is a US gateway that continues to become more and more important as this volatile market surges on. Last year, operators processed record amounts of cargo due to shippers and NVOCs rerouting cargo away from the West Coast. Carriers also development additional services that avoided the West Coast and incorporated ports along the East and Gulf Coasts. One odd environmental factor that can sometimes hamper operations at Houston—one of the Gulf Coasts' largest ports—is sea fog.

Sea fog is a weather phenomenon that is created by significant temperature imbalances.

Around the Gulf in the United States, especially in the winter and spring, the ocean water can get fairly cold. In contrast, the air temperature remains characteristically warm for that region. That disparity can create a thick fog along the water and the immediate coastal area. To point out the obvious, that's where all port operations take place.

“Those are not the safest conditions for operating machinery and handling millions of dollars' worth of equipment and freight,” explained Steve Myers, Vice President of Operations for OEC Group's Northeast Region. “Operators on the vessel side have extremely low visibility when berthing and assisting with the unloading process, and their counterparts on the port side have low visibility when plucking containers from onboard.

Fortunately, safety regulators agree, and the Port of Houston will pause action or adjust as necessary. Unfortunately, this is clearly going to have a negative effect on overall productivity.

Since Houston is the home base of OEC LLS, and Houston and New Orleans are so important in the world of chemical shipping, this is an issue that our team is acutely aware of. Sea fog, as well as other more well-known weather-related issues in the Gulf like hurricanes, heavy winds, and smaller storms, should be take into account when developing a successful supply chain strategy.

