

north shore news

North Shore Guide

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NEWS

Canexus upgrade moves ahead

New technology conversion for chemical plant unveiled to public

Peter Ion

Contributing Writer

A major upgrade to a Dollarton waterfront chlor-alkali facility has taken a step forward with a recent public open house session hosted by the company and its strategic partners.

As part of their required due diligence work, independent surveys suggest that residents and businesses in the vicinity of the Canexus plant east of the Ironworkers Memorial Second Narrows Crossing are unlikely to experience any significant changes to incoming and outgoing traffic during the three-year planned alterations due to commence in 2007 and projected to cost \$130 million. Conditional upon approval at board level in February, the alterations will run until 2009.

Although largely driven by business interests revolving around improvements in process efficiency and increased levels of production, there are significant environmental benefits arising from the proposed changes.

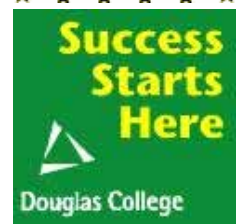
The key alterations will see old asbestos-based diaphragm technology replaced with modern membrane systems for the critical separation processes that convert barge-imported raw material salt and water drawn from Burrard Inlet into chlorine and sodium hydroxide - hence chlor-alkali.

Chlorine is used for water purification and sodium hydroxide (caustic soda) for bleaching, disinfection and wood pulp treatments. Much of the existing infrastructure has been in place since the plant was first constructed in 1957 when the company operated as Hooker Chemicals.

The process changes are in line with the company's commitment to "responsible care" accreditation in which annual performance data are made available to the public through the Internet. The planned process changes are in line with "best available technology" standards now widely practised throughout the

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chemical sector.

The upgrade will allow the plant to increase production of chlorine from the current 150,000 tonnes to 197,000 tonnes a year.

According to plant manager Rick Denton, the upgrade does not involve any land rezoning or reclassification, with the planned changes resulting in a smaller industrial footprint as new structures will occupy a lower total land area.

It is unlikely that local residents will be aware of this ramping up of output as the additional product output will be absorbed by the lengthening of rail carriages and a continuation of work around the clock. Production will be unaffected during the conversion process and noise survey data are within recommended levels and are not expected to impact residential areas.

Canexus claims that there are major benefits from the modifications to the plant that impact health and safety, specifically the reduced risk of any chlorine release from tighter inventory management - a larger number of smaller volume transfers of the final product, lowering the impact of any one single spillage event.

According to Ertugrul Alp of Alp and Associates, the "dread risk" (typically associated with large-scale industrial facilities) probability is further reduced by structural improvements to on-site scrubber technology.

Canexus is keen to highlight its recent safety record. There has been only one minor release (itself with no health consequence to any individual) beyond permitted levels in the last three years.

The facility leases land from the Vancouver Port Authority and also operates on land owned by the District of North Vancouver. Facility managers were keen to point out that the anticipated enhanced asset valuation of the facility will trigger additional taxation revenue for the district. The existing lease with the VPA expires in 2018, nine years after completion of the proposed upgrade but the proposals will not trigger any reviewability criteria for the land.

The refit will also incorporate a major change in on-site power generation, from existing natural gas powered boilers to hydrogen-fuelled units, using hydrogen gas generated as a byproduct of their production process.

Facility manager Dan Parkhill estimates that the reduction in greenhouse gas emissions arising from this upgrade will be in the region of 80 per cent.

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