

Industry sees growth on horizon

By KATLYNN LANHAM | Posted: Sunday, January 1, 2012 2:00 am

It's difficult to talk about the last few years without mentioning the economic uncertainty that invaded the country, yet industry officials are hopeful 2012 will bring growth in the area.

Construction projects like the Chlorine 2 plant at Dow and the Velasco Terminal at Port Freeport will continue while Dow hopes for a new ethylene cracker facility to be approved for the Freeport site this year.

BASF, meanwhile, is looking to remain status quo and the Economic Development Alliance of Brazoria County is searching for businesses looking to build a site in Brazoria County or expand a current one.

DOW TEXAS OPERATIONS

"It's an important year for our growth projects," said Dow spokesman David Winder.

The Chlorine 2 plant will continue to be under construction in 2012, Winder said.

Texas Operations also is competing with a Dow site in Plaquemine, La., for a second ethylene cracker facility, Winder said. Should the company decide to place that facility in Freeport, the investment would be in the billions of dollars and would result in hundreds of new, permanent jobs, he said.

The competition for this project will continue through 2012, Winder said.

"So 2012 is a big year for us," he said. "We're excited to see what happens."

BASF FREEPORT

After completing a great year, including a large project called ICON which included internal plans for growth in 2012, BASF's Freeport site is excited about the new year.

"In 2012, we want to continue that momentum," Chris Witte, senior vice president and site manager said in an emailed statement. Because site officials are aware of current economic uncertainty, Witte expects 2012 to be a year full of challenges.

"But I am confident that our employees will continue to do as they have done for 50-plus years now, and that is to be innovative, creative and motivated to help the Freeport site continue to add value to the BASF company, and to our neighbors in the community," he said.

PORT FREEPORT

"Our primary focus this year is to complete Berth 7," said Phyllis Saathoff, managing director for Port Freeport. She is hoping the project will be done by early 2013, she said.

The Velasco Terminal has been in the works for several years and issues with its structure have delayed it being open for business for some time.

“Now we have a repair plan,” Saathoff said. And with approval from the US Army Corps of Engineers, they hope to begin those repairs in the spring, she said.

Once completed, Port Freeport officials will be looking for a partner to invest in the container facility, and possibly to operate it, she said.

THE ALLIANCE

“The Alliance is working with several existing industries that are studying expansions in 2012, 2013 and beyond,” said Robert Worley, CEO of the Economic Development Alliance of Brazoria County.

One of the largest businesses, a chemical plant, could make a decision by the first quarter 2012, he said.

“The Alliance also continues to get inquiries from new companies from around the world about locating new operations in Brazoria County,” Worley said. Some of these businesses are chemical plants and some are other industries.

Success in bringing expansions and new operations to the area depends on several factors, with local financial incentives being near the top, Worley said.

“We are working with all the taxing entities involved to try to make sure we are competitive with incentives,” he said. “Successful locations could mean hundreds of millions of dollars in capital expenditures and hundreds of very good jobs, so it is very important that we stay competitive with incentives.”

Worley hopes to see 2012 be a very good year for the county.

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