

Requiring Viable Escape Routes Could Kill LNG Plans (The Herald News,

The Dec. 22 letter to the editor from Weaver's Cove President Ted Gehrig, "Facts point to benefits of LNG," was particularly interesting with respect to his comments on evacuation in the event of an LNG emergency.

Mr. Gehrig only reinforced the evacuation issues I wrote about in a Nov. 21 letter to the editor. Although he misrepresented some of the information in that letter, he also confirmed that an emergency response plan for Weaver's Cove requires evacuation routes, not a viable evacuation plan. There is a difference.

The Pipeline Safety Act of 1979 and the Energy Policy Act of 2005 recommend remote siting as a vehicle to ensure LNG safety. FERC had chosen not to follow that recommendation in its consideration of the Weaver's Cove siting for Fall River. Consequently, they have an obligation to follow the intent of the remote siting recommendation by assuring public safety before approving a facility. The point of my letter was that the FERC process is flawed if it does not require a viable evacuation plan. For non-remote sited facilities, a viable evacuation plan should be a part of the FERC pre-filing process.

Mr. Gehrig's letter confirms FERC's flawed process by stating FERC only requires "evacuation routes." Anyone can list evacuation routes without regard to consequences of those stranded in an emergency. That is why the Massachusetts Executive Office of Public Safety and Security wrote to FERC stating: "It is feared that any evacuation would result in mass chaos and create traffic jams that would bring most vehicles to a standstill. Not only would this interfere with evacuation, it would severely impair any kind of emergency response to the area of the proposed facility."

Had Mr. Gehrig read my letter with a little more care, he would have noticed I specifically stated, "With respect to the land-based tank and regasification plant, there are dead-end streets from which the only means of egress in an emergency is toward the facility." Mr. Gehrig obfuscated the issue by a misleading reference to the vessel transit route for the proposed in-the-bay berthing facility, saying there are "no residents in Fall River or Somerset for whom designated evacuation routes would be required."

Since Mr. Gehrig brought it up: One could argue that if FERC's response to citizens' concerns about Freeport LNG trucking and consequential evacuation on water were applied to Fall River, "viable plans" rather than "evacuation routes" for vessel transit near shore in the South End of Fall River and through Mt. Hope and Narragansett Bay's should be included as well.

The bottom line is neither Weaver's Cove nor the 2004-2006 FERC followed the intent of the remote siting provisions of federal law. Given the potentially catastrophic consequences of an LNG emergency, with thermal radiation or vapor dispersion clouds traveling far from the facility, a viable evacuation plan (not simple designation of evacuation routes) addressing the public safety intent of federal law should be demanded by the city of Fall River and the states of Massachusetts and Rhode Island to protect their citizens.

Weaver's Cove knows it cannot create such a plan; it can only rely on "evacuation routes" because of its poor choice for the land-based siting of its facility. Requiring a "viable" plan would most likely kill the project.

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