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Strong Steel Imports, Chemical Exports Produce Year-End Cargo Gains

New Orleans—A more than 38 percent surge in imported steel amid other break-bulk cargo gains led the Port of New Orleans to a third straight year of healthy tonnage increases. Overall, total general cargo tonnages at the Port grew 8.6 percent to 7.55 million tons in 2012 compared to the same period one year ago.

The Port imported more than 1.922 million tons of steel in 2012, compared to 1.389 million tons in 2011. Other top performing commodities included chemical exports, which rose 5.4 percent to 1.75 million tons and poultry and other agriculture exports, which grew by 22.8 percent to 496,000 tons.

“2012 proved to be a marquee year overall for the Port of New Orleans,” said Port President and CEO Gary LaGrange. “We’re seeing the national economy steadily recover and, hopefully, calmer seas ahead for the international economy.”

The Port completed several cargo projects in 2012, which should pay big dividends. Two new post-Panamax gantry cranes able to reach 19-container across went to work, along with a new 40,000 square-foot Riverfront Cold Storage Facility and expanded and improved marshalling yards at several wharfs.

While break-bulk cargo grew, containerized cargo realized little growth following a record year in 2011. In fact, containerized tonnage was up a total of 38 tons compared to 2011 at 4.114 million tons – exactly 0.0 percent year-over-year difference. And while tonnages were flat, total TEUs for the calendar year fell 2.9 percent to 463,147 TEUs, compared to 477,363 in 2011.

LaGrange attributed a mostly flat container year to the uncertain global economic climate.

“The Port of New Orleans’ main trading partner is Europe and many European nations are struggling right now and not restocking inventories as quickly as in years past,” LaGrange said. “Despite that, we are working diligently to grow new markets and build upon successful ones to deliver benefits to all of our customers and tenants.”

The Port of New Orleans is at the center of the world’s busiest port complex – Louisiana’s Lower Mississippi River. Its proximity to the American Midwest via a 14,500-mile inland waterway system, six Class One railroads and the interstate highway system makes New Orleans the port of choice for the movement of cargoes such as steel, rubber, coffee, containers and manufactured goods.

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