

James Barrett visited France-based port operator Fluxel as it upgrades its internal systems to look towards increasing future business

Upgrading to face a diverse future

For the past year the Martigues-based oil ports of Lavera and Fos, which are a short drive away from Marseille in the south of France, have been operated by newly formed company Fluxel.

Born out of the French Harbour Reforms implemented in 2008, Fluxel has hosted more than 3,200 vessels and turned over €32 million over the past 12 months since the Marseille Port Authority assigned Lavera and Fos under its stewardship.

And Fluxel has recently updated its maintenance systems through a partnership with maintenance management software solutions provider Carl Software as, although the port has seen a drop in visiting workload, it wants to streamline its processes to make sure it is ready to handle any future increase.

Over reliance

Lavera and Fos between them handle deliveries of both crude and refined oil, LPG and chemicals with distribution to nearby customers, like Esso and even a NATO pipeline. But Fluxel CEO Michel Peronnet says diversity will be the key as he continues to steer the current leading French port operator into the future.

'Fos welcomed over 1,000 vessels over the past 12 months and it can handle the largest of crude oil supertankers, where as Lavera had over 2,000 port visits and can look after LPG tankers up to 85,000m³. However, due to the closure of plants and refineries



'Which one has the movies channel?' – working at the Fos safety control deck

throughout Europe, we have not been working at full capacity,' he explains.

Peronnet points to the mothballing on New Year's Day of the Lyondell Basell-

owned refinery in Berre, France (which produced 105,000 barrels of oil a day), plus the closure of two plants under the Petroplus brand (Reichstett

Docking at Fos – Fluxel handled 50 million tonnes of product in its first year of operation

in Strasbourg, France and Cressier in Neuchâtel, Switzerland) in 2011 as to reasons why that happened.

'We served eight refineries when we first started and now that number is five, so it is a bit of a worrying trend,' Peronnet says.

'However, there is always some positive news on the horizon as Cressier may reopen under the new ownership of Varo Holdings (a joint venture between Vitol Group and AtlasInvest) by the end of 2012.'

Peronnet is well aware that Fluxel and its ports rely heavily on crude oil

turnover and he believes this dependency will not be sustainable. Of the 50 million tonnes of product Fluxel handled in its first year, over 65% of it across the board was crude, but it only came from 13% of visiting ships. He believes there will be an increase in refined products moving forward.

'A reduction in crude oil tonnage should mean an increase in imported refined product and, for Fluxel, that would mean dealing with smaller-sized ships. However, it shouldn't mean we'd be any less busy and we must diversify our offering to be able to handle any changes,' he adds.

New phase

Carl Software has been working with the Marseille Port Authority since the autumn of 2008 and, before that, Peronnet remembers the old days before the internal maintenance systems were dragged



The port of Fos welcomed over 1,000 vessels over the past 12 months

into the 21st century.

'We used to work with a paper-based, quality assurance system with many folders and spreadsheets containing all the valuable information,' he laughs.

'When Fluxel was created, we used Carl Software's Master system until it offered us the opportunity to upgrade to its new Source version.'

The ability to help get ships in and out of port

as efficiently as possible, and the fact that all the maintenance could be handled in-house, were the two main reasons why the new Source system was attractive to Fluxel.

'Many ports outsource all maintenance queries and repairs and it takes time to get positive results back,' says Carl Software's publisher Jerome Plisson. 'We effectively act as an on-site halfway house to help reduce waiting times for docked ships.'

Plisson explains that all requirements and demands across all facilities can be managed across one grid and be easily accessed from any device that can host the internet.

Peronnet and his colleagues were so impressed that they allowed those members of staff extra time to get to grips with Source, while organising the transfer of all databases that concerned equipment and facilities – a task that took about two days. ●

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