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by [Stephanie Wentworth](#)

### **Staff**

As part of its plan to open a new \$400 million liquefied natural gas plant at Sparrows Point, AES Corp. says it will build a new 5-acre recycling plant for sediment dredged from Baltimore's harbor near the LNG terminal.

The Arlington, Va., company -- which has faced public scrutiny for proposing construction of a power plant near the Turner Station neighborhood of Baltimore County -- hopes the planned recycling plant will help the company gain favor with state and port leaders who fear the Port of Baltimore is running out of places to relocate dredged dirt, sand and rock from the bottom of shipping channels.

AES officials said the Maryland Port Administration, the state agency that operates many of Baltimore's docks, could use their recycling plant to turn debris from the bottom of the harbor into useful materials for road construction, building foundations and coal mine cover.

It also could help spur additional trade through Baltimore's port. Dredging allows ports to deepen shipping lanes to accommodate larger boats that carry more cargo.

"It's a huge benefit for the port," said Kent Morton, AES project manager at Sparrows Point. Morton declined to provide the general cost of the recycling plant.

The private port community -- the half of the industrial port owned by private companies instead of the state -- supports the AES proposal. Port business leaders fear government funding for dredging may dry up as Maryland tries to curb spending and the federal government continues to aid Gulf Coast and Southeastern ports rebuilding from 2005 hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

This is an opportunity to jump-start a dredge recycling program without state or federal funds, said Rupert Denney, president of the Maryland Maritime Association, a trade organization that advocates for the shipping vessel operators, owners and agents at Maryland ports.

Without well-maintained shipping channels, trade at the Port of Baltimore and throughout the state could be affected, said Captain Eric A. Nielsen, president of the Association of Maryland Pilots. If Baltimore isn't able to maintain its shipping channels in the harbor, container ships could decide to unload at neighboring ports, and the CNX Marine Terminal in Dundalk that exports coal wouldn't be able to ship as much overseas, Nielsen said.

To maximize profits, the coal company loads as much coal as it can onto outgoing ships. Those vessels often leave the port with just inches to spare before scraping the bottom of the Patapsco River and shallow portions of the Chesapeake Bay.

The pilots, who guide ships in and out of the narrow Chesapeake Bay, have not taken a position on the proposed LNG terminal, but Nielsen said recycling dredged material is a good idea.

"I hope they are successful," he said.

The Maryland Port Administration has not taken a position on the proposed LNG plant or AES's proposed recycling facility because of the controversy surrounding the gas plant.

But Helen Delich Bentley, a longtime port consultant, said she is concerned Baltimore is running out of places to put dredged materials.

The Baltimore port has to find a way to relocate the 5 million cubic yards of sediment it removes each year, Bentley said. Dredged materials are moved to Hart-Miller Island near Middle River and Poplar Island in Talbot County, but those sites will run out of room for sediment in the next three years, she said.

State port leaders have considered ways to recycle dredged sediment for several years but have been unable to come up with a plan, Bentley said. Still, Bentley said she doesn't believe AES' proposal to share its dredged sediment recycling facility is the answer to Baltimore's problems.

Bentley has consulted for AES but no longer works with the company.

To build its LNG terminal, AES has to remove thousands of cubic yards of sediment to deepen berths, the places where ships will dock to load fuel, from 30 feet to 42 feet, Morton said.

Community activist Sharon Beazley, who opposes the LNG project, said: "I am concerned about the health, safety and quality of life of people in the community."

AES filed an application last month with the Federal Energy Regulator Commission to build the LNG plant on Sparrows Point and construct an 87-mile pipeline to distribute power to customers in the New England and the mid-Atlantic.

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