

The Port of Houston Delivers First and Foremost from the Very Beginning

The Port of Houston and the Houston Ship Channel have an impressive list of “first” accomplishments.

- The Houston Ship Channel was the first project to have a local match component. In 1909, Houston Mayor Horace Baldwin Rice and Congressman Tom Ball presented the “Houston Plan” to the U.S. House of Representatives Rivers and Harbors Committee. Congress approved it, and every port constructed in the U.S. since 1910 has followed this concept, which guarantees local financial support.
- The first direct shipment of cotton to Europe was 23,719 bales that left the Port of Houston in November 1919 on the M/V Merry Mount.
- By 1930, the Port of Houston had surpassed all its Texas rivals and ranked third in the U.S. for foreign exports.
- In 1937, the Port of Houston reached the status of second only to New York in tonnage and importance, according to Fortune Magazine. Its position slipped slightly during World War II, but by 1948, the Port of Houston was once again No. 2 in overall tonnage.
- Synthetic rubber was mass produced for the first time in 1943 by two new Houston area plants and shipped for use in World War II through the Port of Houston.
- After World War II, development of the petrochemical industry along the Houston Ship Channel accelerated, resulting in the Port of Houston becoming home to the nation’s largest petrochemical production complex and one of the largest in the world.
- Containerization was born when the world’s first container ship, M/V Ideal X, sailed with 58 containers from New York/New Jersey and unloaded at the Port of Houston in April 1956.
- Developed by the Port of Houston Authority, the Houston World Trade Building was the first facility of its kind in the U.S. The \$3.5 million building opened January 29, 1962, and was designed as a central location for international trade interests including consular offices, transportation companies, importers and exporters.
- In 1962, Houston became the first choice of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration for the site of its new headquarters. Houston was selected for the manned space program partially because of the fact that our ship channel and port facilities provided an excellent means for transporting bulky space vehicles.
- Use of the double-stack train was introduced at the Port of Houston in 1981. By placing one container on top of another, transportation costs were greatly reduced.
- In July, 1983 the Houston Foreign Trade Zone became the first multi-site zone approved by the U. S. Foreign Trade Board in Washington, D.C.
- In 1990, the fast-loading Spiralveyors were installed at Jacintoport, making it the first facility of its kind in the country.

- Also in 1990, the Beneficial Uses Group – affectionally called the BUG -- was formed to address ways dredge material from the Houston Ship Channel could be put to an environmentally friendly use. A 250-acre demonstration marsh was built, which surpassed anything ever attempted in marsh restoration. Over the 50-year life of the deepening and widening project, an unprecedented 4,250 acres of marsh, a six-acre bird island, the 3,000-foot long Goat Island and Redfish Island will be built. Redfish Island was the first marsh island to be completed; it was dedicated in March 2003.
- During the Gulf War in 1990-91, the Port of Houston was the third largest load center for the U.S. military, and No. 2 in the number of ships handled.
- In 1996, the Port of Houston became the first U.S. port with a multi-site DAMP (Disposal Area Management Program).
- Originally built in 1953, the Baytown Tunnel had to be removed in 1997 as a part of the deepening and widening of the Houston Ship Channel. Houston became the first port to remove a tunnel of this magnitude (35' diameter by 1041' in length) without closing the ship channel, lost time accidents or navigational safety impacts.
- The Port of Houston first joined the 1 million container club in 1999 when it moved 1,001,170 TEUs.
- In 2000, the Environmental Protection Agency selected the Port of Houston as the only port to be trained in the creation of sophisticated environmental management systems.
- Also in 2000, the Port of Houston became the first U.S. port to conduct air emissions testing on off-road equipment.
- In 2002, the Port of Houston became the first U.S. port with an Environmental Management System that meets ISO 14001 standards for environmental excellence.
- In 2004, the Port of Houston became the first U.S. port recertified to the new ISO 14001:2004 standard for environmental excellence.