

VESDA Customer Success Story

∴ Panama City Port Authority

““ We’ve looked at other smoke detection and suppression systems and they are all after the fact, which is too late. VESDA detected our fire BEFORE damage occurred.””

– John Ramer
Manager of Terminal Services
Panama City Port Authority

The Panama City Port Authority was created in 1945 by special act of the Florida Legislature to assist the U.S. Government in dismantling the Liberty Ships for scrap reprocessing following wartime. Today’s port operations date back to 1967 when the first warehouse was erected, reaching 500 ft. (152 m) deepwater berth and 40,000 sq. ft. (4,000 m²). Since that time, the Port has added 3,900 linear ft. (1,200 m) of deepwater bulkhead and 350,000 sq. ft. (35,000 m²) of warehouse space.

Panama City’s location provides a Gulf coast gateway to shippers and consignees in Georgia, Alabama, Florida, Tennessee, and the Carolinas. The port is ever growing and handles a wide variety of cargo. In recent years the Port invested over \$50 million in new facilities and equipment.

One of the goods stored within the Panama City’s Port are biomass wood pellets produced by Green Circle Bio Energy – a producer of biomass renewable energy, the wood pellets are made from pine wood supplied to the power generating industry for co-firing in coal based power plants.

VESDA was ultimately chosen to protect the warehouse after representatives from Panama City Port Authority made a site visit to a potential customer in Sweden who utilizes VESDA air-sampling smoke detection. After discussing their success with the system, the choice was clear as to which system to implement in the Panama City facility.



Panama City Port Authority
390,000 sq. ft. (39,000 m²)warehouse
operation starting in 1967

Location:
Panama City, Florida - USA

Industry:
Port/Warehouse

Installation Partner:
Milton J. Wood Fire Protection

Solutions:
• VESDA VLP

Benefits:
• Very early warning smoke detection
• Tolerance of harsh and dirty environments
• Easy installation and maintenance

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In 2008, nine VESDA VLP air-sampling smoke detection units were deployed in the 80,000 sq. ft. (7,432 m²) warehouse within the port by Milton J. Wood Fire Protection. Due to the nature of the goods, storing wood pellets can be a significant challenge. It was critical to select a smoke detection system that would provide very early warning to prompt intervention to prevent damage or loss in addition to enabling an evacuation if a fire event should occur.

Besides VESDA's high sensitivity and superior performance, it was chosen because of its ability to function in the challenging warehouse environment, particularly in the large, open environment that is conducive to dust and dirt while storing highly flammable materials. The environment prompted a unique add-on feature of the installation that includes a sampling pipe back-flush system using compressed air.

The system proved its absolute reliability and unparalleled situational awareness to deter threats before personnel, facilities, stock and business continuity are compromised. Within months after the system had been implemented; alarms triggered, prompting the local fire department to respond. Upon arrival, fire authorities searched the warehouse for the source of the alarm but were unable to find the cause of alarm.

Within the warehouse a tripper car was used to control product flow. A Port Authority employee noted smoke up by this car. Upon further investigation, the employee climbed up to the tripper car and found flames in the enclosed head box of the tripper car. The drum within the tripper car had shifted, allowing the belt to rub the wall, conducting enough heat to start a fire.

VESDA was able to identify a potential hazard before employees and the fire department even knew there was a problem. Had it not been for VESDA, the results could have proven devastating.



Founded in 1991, Milton J. Wood Fire Protection is a full service consulting, design, fabrication, installation and inspection contractor for all types of fire protection, fire detection, fire suppression and fire alarm systems including "Special Hazards" systems of all types. Milton J. Wood Fire Protection is headquartered in Jacksonville, Florida and operates offices in Lakeland, Florida and Savannah, Georgia.

Milton J. Wood Fire Protection is member of the Fire Suppression Systems Association (FSSA), National Fire Sprinkler Association (NFSA) and the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA). For more information, visit www.mjwood.com/fire-protection.



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