

Business

Jan. 24, 2008, 11:41PM

Houston exports rise 28% as city keeps No. 2 rank

By JENALIA MORENO

Copyright 2008 Houston Chronicle

Houston's exports jumped 28 percent to \$53.3 billion in 2006, according to a new analysis of exporting data the U.S. Department of Commerce released Thursday.

The Bayou City maintained its ranking as the nation's second-biggest exporter, trailing the New York City region, which exported \$66.2 billion in merchandise. Houston beat out Los Angeles, which exported \$48.7 billion in 2006.

"The statistics validate how competitive Houston companies are in a global economy," said Duaine Priestly, director of the department's Houston Export Assistance Center.

In 2006, 116 cities made sales of \$1 billion or more, contributing to the nation's \$1.4 trillion in goods and services exported.

"Exports boost jobs, grow the economy and allow businesses to prosper," Commerce Secretary Carlos Gutierrez said in a written statement.

Chemicals accounted for \$18.9 billion of the city's exported goods and were the top export in 2006. Petroleum and coal products were another top export at \$10.1 billion.

Free trade agreements with Mexico, Canada and Central America helped the city boost its exports, experts said.

"We will also see new markets gaining significance with recently enacted free trade agreements," said Adam Gibson, the Greater Houston Partnership's vice president of international business.

jenalia.moreno@chron.com