

# Cold Storage Conference Recap 2024





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**Fall was a busy season for cold storage, with three major conferences occurring: GCCA-GCCF Convention in September, NAIOP I.CON Cold Storage in October, and CEBA Conference & Expo in November.**

GCCA was a whirlwind...literally...with Hurricane Helene cutting the planned 4-day event to just a couple of days. Despite the weather, it was good to reconnect with the people who own and run cold storage facilities.

A couple of weeks later I was in Vegas for NAIOP I.CON Cold. As a member of the planning committee, I helped to bring together the New Trends in Cold Storage Design and Construction panel, who discussed automation, sustainability, and regulatory changes impacting how cold storage is being designed and built.

I also helped with the Insights from Cold Storage Operators panel. NAIOP wrote a recap of that [panel](#).



West Hutchison, Chris Hughes & Tim O'Rourke

Finally, I helped to organize a tour of Martin Brower's new multi-temp facility in Henderson, <https://blog.naiop.org/2024/10/cool-industrial-in-the-southern-nevada-heat/>. While at my previous firm, I worked on the schematic design of this project, so it was exciting to see it built. Deepest thanks to Martin Brower for allowing us to tour this facility.

One thing I picked up on at I.CON Cold was differing opinions regarding older cold storage facilities. It struck me as similar to used cars – is it better to keep on maintaining an older vehicle, or upgrade to a more eco-friendly new car? And if that old car doesn't pass inspections, you may need to upgrade it anyway. Some developers noted that old cold storage buildings may have plenty of life left in them, and newer embodied carbon regulations may incentivize building re-use. Others noted how new construction improves energy efficiency, allows for labor-saving automation, and may be necessary to meet food safety, fire safety, and refrigerant regulations.

Cold conference season wrapped up back in Florida for the CEBA Conference & Expo. I had the pleasure of acting as

facilitator of the Controlled Environment Design & Consumer Trends table at this year's Construction Café. For consumer trends, e-commerce grocery was discussed, noting that the pandemic stop-gap of in-store-fulfillment is giving way to more dedicated industrial e-commerce fulfillment. Case pick was also noted as a trend. More space is warehouses is being dedicated to case-pick and layer-pick operations based on demands from the retail end of the supply chain.

On the design trends side, high-rise cold storage has been a long-term trend, but the new twist is multi-level docks. Upper dock levels are served by parking-structure-like loading levels. This is primarily in areas where land is at a premium, and larger amounts of dock loading positions are needed. Vertical conveyors may be used to move product between levels.

It was also noted that increased developer involvement in cold storage design is resulting in more future-proofing via convertible rooms. Another trend, package refrigeration, seems to tie well with convertible rooms.



Gary O'Donnell, Jeremy Bentley, Michael Jones & Vince Free

Finally, aesthetics in cold storage design was discussed as another trend. Local jurisdictions continue to push against the big-white-box; designers must balance these demands with the technical demands of envelope design. Pre-cast/tilt-up on docks is one way to build in some aesthetics, but owner requirements are still split between IMP and concrete on the dock face. Parapets also came up, but this is also being driven by problems with gutters falling off of buildings. Larger buildings has led to larger & heavier gutters, and the traditional IMP attachment is breaking away. Scuppers and parapets are one possible solution, which also allows for

some aesthetic options in building design. But the technical demands of the envelope still have to take precedence over aesthetic considerations.

I'm also happy that I am back on the CEBA Board for 2025! I'm continuing to be very active in the Construction & Codes Committee, where I am working with subcommittees continuing to expand guidance on food processing facilities, as well as updating cold storage guidance.