

# Top Ongoing Failures Of The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

## *Major Problems That Could Kill Louisiana's Recovery*

### **1. Missed June 01 Deadline For Completing Work On Outfall Canals**

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (“the Corps”) missed what it set as perhaps its most important deadline—completing by June 01 work on the three outfall canals off Lake Pontchartrain in Orleans and Jefferson Parishes which breached after Hurricane Katrina. This failure could cause significant flooding in the area this hurricane season. In fact, the Corps had completed inundation studies in March, which it has refused to release publicly to date. These studies show that tens of thousands of homes could flood from a major storm's rainfall this season because of this failure. Such an event would cause enormous loss of confidence in the recovery and very serious further population loss from the area. Points 2 and 3 below outline this more fully.

### **2. Inadequate Pumping Capacity On 17<sup>th</sup> Street Canal**

Because of the Corps' failures, the 17<sup>th</sup> Street Canal has only a small percentage of the pumping capacity required to evacuate rainfall from Orleans and Jefferson Parishes when the new gates at the lake are closed during a significant storm. According to the Corps' newest schedule, the canal has only 11 percent of its pre-Katrina pumping capacity, and will only have 63 percent after October 31 for the rest of this hurricane season. Again, this could cause significant flooding in Orleans and Jefferson Parishes, which would cause enormous loss of confidence and further significant population loss.

What is most disheartening is that this is not due primarily to unavoidable engineering obstacles but to multiple Corps organizational failures, a lack of a true sense of emergency and urgency, and conscious decisions to slow spending rather than maximize pumping capacity for this season. For instance:

- a) Delay Of Pump Order: Even though this pumping capacity issue should have been an absolute top Corps priority since last fall, the Corps only had designs for the required pumps at the new gates in February, and then only

put them out to bid in early June. Due to administrative problems and possible pump redesigns, it then postponed and has now cancelled the pump solicitation. As of this date, there is no current solicitation to acquire pumps beyond the very few that have been installed to date. These delays have sacrificed some pumping capacity that was achievable for at least part of the 2006 hurricane season.

- b) Lack Of Hydraulic Gate Closure: The Corps does not have ready for this hurricane season the hydraulic mechanism to close the new canal gates in the event of a major storm. Because of this, the gates can only be closed to protect the canal from lake storm surge this hurricane season using cranes. But the cranes cannot operate in winds greater than 30 mph. This means that the gates will have to be closed much earlier and more frequently than would otherwise be necessary, increasing the time frame during which rainfall will flood Orleans and Jefferson Parishes because of the inadequate pumping capacity. For example, if a storm with Hurricane Katrina's characteristics and path were to hit this season, the new gates would have to be closed up to two days before landfall because of this crane issue rather than 12 hours before. The difference due to this factor alone is up to 36 more hours of rainfall with inadequate pumping capacity—and even thousands more homes flooded.
- c) Delayed Work On Backup Generators: The Corps also has delayed for months the installation of backup generators in the permanent pumping stations in Orleans Parish. In many cases backup generators are still not due to be hooked up until the end of July even though the hurricane season began June 01. This apparently is due to an extremely conservative, tortured, and limiting reading of authorization language prior to the latest supplemental spending bill, even though Congress gave the Corps extremely broad emergency authority to protect life and property from flooding as far back as 1955 (*funds may be used “in the repair or restoration of any flood control work threatened or destroyed by flood, including the strengthening, raising, extending, or other modification thereof as may be necessary in the discretion of the Chief of Engineers for the adequate functioning of the work for flood control”*). Since pumping stations would lose conventional power in any major storm, their pumping capacity would be reduced to zero with no backup generator power, and significant flooding would ensue.
- d) Lack Of Cooperation With Local Officials: In light of all of the above, Jefferson Parish officials have been working for months on targeted efforts

to reduce the rainfall flooding threat for this season, including innovative ponding efforts. The Corps has not been helpful in these efforts in any way (after creating the problem).

### **3. Inadequate Pumping Capacity On London Avenue Canal**

Similar to the 17<sup>th</sup> Street Canal, the London Avenue Canal will have only a fraction of the pumping capacity it needs this hurricane season – 14 percent now and only 61 percent from October 31 until the end of the season. Again, the looming threat this creates is the flooding of tens of thousands of homes this season, which would cause enormous loss of confidence in the recovery and significant further population loss.

### **4. No Armoring Work**

Soon after Katrina, the Corps joined with other engineering experts in concluding that armoring levees is an absolute top priority in rebuilding and strengthening the system. Yet amazingly, the Corps will not do any of this armoring work in time for this hurricane season (outside of some of the completely reconstructed levee sections). Once again, this apparently is due to an extremely conservative, tortured, and limiting reading of authorization language prior to the latest supplemental spending bill, even though Congress gave the Corps extremely broad emergency authority to protect life and property from flooding as far back as 1955 (*funds may be used “in the repair or restoration of any flood control work threatened or destroyed by flood, including the strengthening, raising, extending, or other modification thereof as may be necessary in the discretion of the Chief of Engineers for the adequate functioning of the work for flood control”*).

### **5. Missed Deadline For Harvey Canal Sector Gates**

The Corps will miss its August 01 deadline for completion of the Harvey Canal sector gate protection as authorized under the Westbank And Vicinity Hurricane Protection Project. The gates are designed to block storm surge from Lakes Cataouatche and Salvador into populated areas of the westbank of Jefferson Parish. Because of this missed deadline, no protection will be provided to this area of Jefferson Parish this hurricane season.

### **6. Slow Drawdown Of Appropriated Funds In General**

After testifying on numerous occasions that no work would be delayed because of inadequate Corps or contractor manpower, the Corps has exhibited an extremely slow drawdown of its appropriated funds for all of this work. In general, the Corps seems to have drifted back to its normal bureaucratic mindset and speed, with no sense of emergency or urgency.