



REPLY TO
ATTENTION OF

DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
NEW ORLEANS DISTRICT, CORPS OF ENGINEERS
P. O. BOX 60267
NEW ORLEANS, LOUISIANA 70160-0267

September 14, 2001

Planning, Programs and Project Management Division
Project Management Branch-East

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Mr. Jim Amoss, Editor
The Times-Picayune
3800 Howard Avenue
New Orleans, La. 70125

Dear Editor:

This responds to the September 10, 2001 letter from the Holy Cross Neighborhood Association concerning the Corps of Engineers' plans to replace the Industrial Canal Lock. Statements were made about sediments in the canal that could cause undue alarm.

First, we reject the assertions that our analyses of the sediments in the Canal are inadequate and that replacing the antiquated lock will endanger the adjacent community. Our analyses, contained in the Evaluation Report/Environmental Impact Statement (Report/EIS) dated March 1997, showed the presence of some contaminants. However, the contaminant levels are too low to cause significant problems, nor problems that cannot be safely overcome by proper dredging and disposal procedures. We have successfully employed these procedures at other construction sites with similar contamination levels. This is explained in the 1977 Report/EIS, which was approved by local, state and federal environmental agencies.

The Corps has taken additional soil and sediment samples under the Galvez Street Wharf that show similarly low levels of contamination. We have awarded a contract for the demolition of this wharf, as one of the initial contracts for this project. The public can rest assured that all local, state and federal environmental requirements are being followed carefully to ensure the safety of our employees, the contractors, adjoining neighborhoods and the environment.

The Lake Ponchartrain Basin Foundation has recently furnished the Corps with the results of a more recent sampling program it performed for the Holy Cross Neighborhood Association. The Corps has requested more details about this information from the Lake Ponchartrain Basin Foundation so we can fully evaluate these data. If, after review of these results, the Corps determines that additional sampling is needed, the Corps will perform the sampling prior to any dredging in this area. The presence of contaminated materials in these

sediments comes as no surprise since the previous sampling program identified the same contaminants. However, the assertion that there is a threat to public health in this area is unfounded. The Corps of Engineers is experienced in the handling of contaminated sediments. For general guidance used in these matters, here is the Web site of the Corps' Center for Contaminated Sediments: <http://www.wes.army.mil/el/dots/ccs/index.html>.

Finally, the letter questions the relationship between the lock replacement project and the proposed closure of the Mississippi River Gulf Outlet (MRGO). The Corps is studying the potential for closing the MRGO to deep-draft ships. The predominant user of this deep draft canal is the container shipping industry. Some of its facilities are being relocated to the Mississippi River, which will provide some justification for closure. But other deep-draft users of the canal will still have to be accommodated. That means that the MRGO may not be able to be closed until another access can be provided for deep-draft ships. A longer and wider Industrial Canal Lock will provide that access. These issues are being addressed in the Corps' Reevaluation Study.

Sincerely,

Thomas F. Julich
Colonel, US Army
District Engineer

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