



**US Army Corps
of Engineers**
St. Louis District®

Press Release

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Locks 27 Aux Lock Reopening Soon, Main Chamber Closes after New Year

ST. LOUIS – The Army Corps of Engineers, St. Louis District will reopen Locks 27's 600-foot auxiliary chamber on Thursday, December 22 after closing it October 17 for rehabilitation work. The closure is part of a two-phase process that will replace lift gate machinery and counterweights on both of the lock's chambers.

The lock chamber was originally scheduled to reopen December 13 but the date was extended due to delays in removing concrete and replacing the counterweights. The original counterweights, which were installed when the facility was constructed over 50 years ago and weigh 170,000 lbs., aid in raising and lowering the lift gates, allowing river traffic to enter and exit the lock chamber. The new counterweights will weigh up to 270,000 lbs.

The main 1,200-foot lock chamber will close January 3 and reopen March 1. Lessons learned from the closure of the auxiliary lock will be applied to completing the main chamber within the scheduled time frame.

"As we've talked about before, one of the unique aspects of the work being done to the main chamber is that it is nearly identical to that done to the auxiliary chamber," said Jay Fowler, resident engineer for the project. "Some of the adjustments we will make for the main chamber should save us several days in the end."

He added that pre-closure work, which includes the demolition of a portion of one of the offices to gain access to some of the counterweights, has already begun. The pre-closure work will not impact the operation of the main chamber prior to its scheduled closure next month.

Without access to the 1,200-foot chamber, larger tows will be required to lock through the smaller auxiliary chamber in two sections, a process that can take up to an hour and a half. As necessary, the towing industry will use a self help program, using pull boats, to assist in pulling the sections through the lock.

The closure of the main chamber will facilitate not only the replacement of lift gate machinery and counterweights but will also provide an opportunity for the District's Service Base to replace tensioning rods and nuts on the bottom of the 70-foot-tall downstream miter gates.

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The chamber was closed July 26, 2004 to August 11, 2004 to replace failed tensioning rods and nuts on the top of the diagonal straps of each gate leaf. Similar work on the bottom of the gates was postponed at that time due to high groundwater levels, which prevented unwatering of the chamber at the time. Dive inspections have confirmed that the bottom rods are in need of replacement.

“Our engineers have been assessing for weeks the possibility of unwatering the main chamber at the same time it is closed for replacement of the liftgate machinery and counterweights,” said Andy Schimpf, Rivers Project Manager. “We do not want to interfere with the ongoing contract repairs but we also want to take full advantage of this opportunity. Whenever the main chamber is closed it has a significant impact on the navigation industry. Doing both items of work during this closure eliminates the need to close the chamber a second time, a great benefit to the navigation industry.”

Bulkheads used to create a temporary cofferdam will be installed on February 6, prior to pumping the water level down inside the main chamber.

“The chamber won’t be pumped dry, there will still be about 10 feet of water remaining,” said Fowler.

It’s estimated to take 10 days to complete the work on the tensioning rods.

Although Corps of Engineers employees will be performing the work to the tensioning rods, Midwest Foundation, Inc. of Tremont, Ill., (near Peoria, Ill.) is replacing the lift gate machinery and counterweights.

Winter is not the ideal time for this type of work but it is the best time for navigation. It corresponds with the annual closure of the upper river in Minnesota and winter is typically a slower time for the industry.

Locks 27 is the busiest lock on the Upper Mississippi River, annually locking through over 70 million tons of commodities and acting as the access point to the Upper Mississippi River, as well as the Illinois River.

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Photo cutline:

Midwest Foundation employees position one of the counterweights prior to adding the lead weights. This particular counterweight will weight 178,000 lbs after the individual lead weights, which ranging from 800 to 1,700 lbs., are added. The individual weights allow for flexibility in attaining the proper weight, allowing the equipment to operate as efficiently as possible. USACE photo

Editor’s Note: Media wishing to visit Locks 27 during the closure are asked to coordinate their visit through the Public Affairs Office. There will be no unescorted access to the work site. The Public Affairs Office can be reached at 314-331-8068/8095.