



**US Army Corps
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St. Louis District

Press Release

Release No. 09-07

Contact: Nicole Dalrymple
314-331-8068

For Release: **IMMEDIATE** – May 7, 2007

1222 Spruce Street, Saint Louis, Missouri 63103-2833

Gate Repairs and Component Replacements Coming to Main Lock at Melvin Price Locks and Dam in Alton, Illinois

St. Louis -- The 1,200-foot-long main lock at the Melvin Price Locks and Dam in Alton, Ill., will receive gate hoisting cable replacement, electronic control system replacements, and miter gate repairs and replacements starting May 10. To facilitate work, the lock chamber will be closed to navigation until July 3, approximately 54 calendar days. The 600-foot auxiliary lock will remain open during repairs.

A regional repair crew from six U.S. Army Corps of Engineers districts, consisting mostly of crews from St. Louis and Rock Island Districts, will be working two 12-hour shifts, seven days a week to expedite these repairs. A multidistrict team of engineers will provide quality control, as well as help make expedient and effective decisions should issues arise following the dewatering of the chamber's gate bays.

Andy Schimpf, project manager of the St. Louis District's Rivers Project Office in West Alton, Mo., explained that combining the three major repairs, enacting the sizable repair crew, and working double shifts are all measures the Army Corps is taking in order to minimize impacts to navigation interests. The St. Louis District worked closely with the navigation industry on setting these dates to minimize impacts and to give them ample time to plan for the closure.

This temporary closure is necessary to replace components that, if they should fail, would necessitate an even longer unscheduled closure with serious impacts to the navigation industry.

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2-2-2/LOCKREPAIRS

While the Melvin Price Locks and Dam facility is the newest on the Mississippi River's system of locks and dams, placed in service October 10, 1989, periodic maintenance and replacement of key components is necessary to ensure the lock continues to operate safely and reliably.

Workers will focus on replacing lift gate cables and electronic drive systems at the upstream end of the main chamber, while on the downstream end, miter gate repairs will include new cross braces, called 'diagonals.' The new cross braces will allow engineers to tension the gates using only the top bolts, instead of the previous requirement to adjust bottom tensioning bolts as well. This will enable adjustments to be done in the future without dewatering the gates, a substantial savings on time and money.

"We are committed to ensuring that the Melvin Price Locks continue to provide reliable service, and we will be working as quickly, and as safely as possible, to ensure the main lock reopens on schedule," said Col. Lewis F. Setliff III, district commander for the St. Louis District.

The 1,200-foot-long main chamber can pass an entire 15-barge tow, typically the largest barge configuration on the Upper Mississippi River, in one operation. This process usually takes less than a half hour. With the 600-foot-long auxiliary chamber, it is necessary to break 15-barge tows into two sections for locking, what is called a double-cut lockage. This process can take about an hour and a half. A helper boat will be onsite during the closure to assist with double-cut lockages through the auxiliary lock.

Approximately 6,500 tows lock through Melvin Price each year, carrying over 70 million tons of cargo.

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Editor's Note: The St. Louis District Public Affairs Office will be notifying the media of opportunities and milestones associated with these repairs and plans to coordinate several media opportunities at the lock. After hours, contact Alan Dooley at 618-719-9039 (cell) or 618-939-5985 (home).