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News Release

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Media Update – Chain of Rocks Locks 27 main chamber repairs

St. Louis, MO – March 25, 2009 – Work by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to repair the downstream miter gate on the main 1200-foot-long, 110-foot wide chamber at the Chain of Rocks Locks 27, near Granite City, Ill., Sunday is proceeding. But the lock is not now expected to return to full service until Thursday, March 26 vice Wednesday as was earlier announced.

Engineers and technicians on scene completed pouring an epoxy support pad for the anchorage of the hydraulic cylinder that moves one of the giant miter gates that open and shut like doors at the locks.

To ensure proper application of the material, a technical representative of the epoxy material's supplier was brought in to advise Corps workers. Work was held up for several hours by bad weather Tuesday afternoon and evening, but the material pour was completed at 8:45 p.m. Tuesday night.

Time for the material to properly cure depends on temperatures. While Corps technicians are warming the area with a tent cover and warm air, the manufacturer's representative recommended allowing the full 48-hour curing time before testing could begin.

The damage is located on the Illinois side gate leaf at the south, or downstream end of the chamber. Each of the gates is 65-feet wide and 70-feet tall. Each leaf weighs about 220 tons, or about the same as the Statue of Liberty.

The lock's adjacent 600-foot auxiliary chamber has continued in service during the main chamber closing. While it is usually used for smaller tows than the 15-barge tows that can be accommodated in the main chamber in a single lockage, the smaller chamber can accommodate these tows in what are termed "double-cut" operations.

In that process, up to nine barges are locked through first, using a helper boat to pull them out of the chamber and hold them. Then the next six barge "cut" and its tow boat are locked and the tow is reassembled by deckhands. This takes one-and-a-half to two hours vice a single-cut lockage which normally takes about 20 minutes.

The Corps of Engineers is continuing to coordinate with navigation industry interests to minimize traffic interruptions. High winds for the past day slowed navigation on the Mississippi and Illinois Rivers, which has lessened the back up at Locks 27.

During this maintenance and resulting slow down, the Corps today coordinated an eight hour closure of the Melvin Price Locks and Dam near Alton, Ill to start at 6:30 a.m. tomorrow morning. This will permit technicians to replace an electrical panel that was damaged in a recent thunder storm. While this is not related to the Locks 27 closure, it was agreed that this would permit work to be conducted at the Melvin Price Locks and Dam efficiently with very minimal added negative impact.

The locks at the south end of the Chain of Rocks Canal, which parallels a treacherous stretch of the Mississippi River, are the entry and exit point to and from the system of 29 locks and dams that support navigation on the Upper Mississippi River. Each year some 70-80 million tons of bulk commodities and hundreds of small private vessels transit the locks north and southbound.