# NEWS RELEASE

U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS

BUILDING STRONG®

**For Immediate Release:**
November 2, 2009
Release No.: 09-32

**Contact:**
Public Affairs, 314-331-8002 / 8095
Alan.J.Dooley@usace.army.mil
George.E.Stringham@usace.army.mil

## ARRA accelerates levee inspections nationwide

**ST. LOUIS** – Most people who live and work behind levees are aware of their presence. A few have an appreciation of what they do. For many, driving by a levee every day, the vision of it towering above the surrounding terrain is reassuring. "We're safe. Look at that thing."

But as a wise person once observed, "The devil is in the details."

It is those details that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Levee Safety Program is trying to get its arms around. They are working with the strong support of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) Some $90 million have been targeted to take a comprehensive and detailed look at the levees that protect citizens and property and for which the Corps of Engineers exercises technical oversight. The objective is to make levees safer and to reduce public danger from flooding.

St. Louis District is heading up the national program Corps wide with a lot of help from a cast of players throughout the Corps; HQ, St. Paul Minnesota, Cold Regions Research Laboratory in New Hampshire, and many more. The individual Corps Districts are doing most of the heavy lifting for getting the contracts underway, performing quality assurance, and the daunting task of communicating the findings at the conclusion of the inspections.

The ARRA is targeting both putting people to work and creating lasting benefits to the nation and its citizens. Especially for those who live and work behind levees, better understanding of how the levees work and their condition, is critical. But it is also important for those who depend on levees to protect infrastructure on which they depend – schools, hospitals, roads, communications, pipelines, port facilities, etc.

The nation's levees fall into categories ranging from Federal levees – those built and maintained by Federal authorities – to private levees which are sometimes built to no specific standards. The federal and private levees are receiving various levels of maintenance to assure their operation and readiness; some good and some bad.

There is a popular misconception that all levees built by the Federal government remain its – and by extension, the Corps' responsibility to operate and maintain. In fact, the majority of the nation's federally constructed levees are turned over to local sponsors to operate and maintain.

- more -

**Nationwide Levee Inspections / 2-2-2**

A subset of the spectrum of protective systems are levees covered under Public Law, or PL84-99. These may be levees built by private entities like drainage and levee districts. They must pass an initial inspection and then be operated and maintained in accordance with a set of rules. They must pass annual inspections of their maintenance and operating procedures to stay in the "84-99 program."

As long as these locally built and operated levees continue to pass inspections, if they are damaged by flooding, their repairs are supported by the Federal government on a cost-shared basis: 80-20, with the Federal government providing the large portion. Federally-built levees damaged in a flood would be repaired totally with Federal funding.

As an improvement to the levee safety program, these same levees are to be inspected by a more comprehensive multi-discipline engineering team; called a periodic inspection. The periodic inspections will be performed on an approximately five year frequency dependent on the levee system and funding.

These inspections examine and confirm the operations of elements of a levee system, such as pumps, relief wells and closures. They may delve into evidences of how a levee has and will perform under stress, such as under seepage and other indications.

Approximately 40 commercial architect-engineer firms will carry out the inspections under the Recovery Act Project and create condition reports utilizing a tool called the Levee Inspection System (LIS). The LIS is a tablet computer which uses GPS technology to record the locations and capture information of the nature of issues found during the inspection.

Goals include first and foremost public safety by gaining a better understanding of levee systems performance and what we should focus on to better evaluate them and their predicted performance before a flood tests them in real time. Another goal is better standardizing the necessary process to ensure a nationwide standard to evaluate levees and ultimately to be in the best position possible to use this knowledge to prioritize fixes and rehabilitation where necessary. All of this will make the people and property protected by levees safer.

As people drive by levees, they have only fleeting opportunities to grasp their importance to their safety. During floods such as the summer of 2008, most recently, they gain a new appreciation of the consequences of levee failures.

It is the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' job to assess and ensure that the levees are as strong as they look and will perform as well as people expect. This effort is a large step forward toward that objective.



**U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS – ST LOUIS DISTRICT**
1222 Spruce Street, St. Louis, MO 63103
http://www.mvs.usace.army.mil