



PRESS RELEASE

U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS

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For Immediate Release:

November 18, 2009
Release No.: 09-34

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Wood River Levee near Melvin Price Locks and Dam being watched

St. Louis, Mo. – Recently, St. Louis District geotechnical engineers observed underseepage, which is being seen in the form of small, but significant quantities of water moving under the Wood River Levee adjacent to Melvin Price Locks and Dam near Alton, Ill. The issue was observed in the area east of Highway 143 where water from both the levee underseepage and inland rainfall is collected for subsequent drainage or pumping into the Mississippi River. District engineers have noted that while some flows of water are not an abnormal phenomenon for an earthen levee, at some higher levels upstream of the lock and dam, such as during recent high water, they have observed small amounts of sand being carried in the water.

The kind of material observed is apparently being carried from under the levee by groundwater flow from the river, especially at higher river levels. Left unchecked, this could precipitate a possible failure of the levee under some circumstances such as a high water event on the Mississippi River or flooding. But there is no intention to ignore this issue, levee safety specialists emphasize.

The District Commander, Col. Thomas E. O'Hara, Jr., has emphasized to the team working on this issue that public safety is and will remain the primary focus. The only acceptable answer is a sound engineering solution. While engineers emphasize that risks associated with levees can never be totally eliminated, they can be lowered to acceptable levels that will permit people to routinely live and work in areas they protect with a high degree of confidence in their performance.

The Chief of Engineering and Construction Division, Dave Busse, said the movement of material observed recently is not of the magnitude of larger sand boils such as have been observed and dealt with during past floods and high water events, including during the summer of 2008. But he said that observing this material movement at lower river elevations showed that if left unrepaired before the next flood event, there is an unacceptable level of risk. He called seeing the material movement a threshold which has made us increase attention and galvanized us to define the problem and a best engineering solution.

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2-2-2-2 Wood River Levee being watched

District geotechnical engineers are currently evaluating potential risks, but at this time, they do not feel that failure is an imminent threat. A number of investigatory steps and monitoring procedures, including installing instrumentation equipment, visual monitoring of the area by District personnel and relief well tests, are being conducted. The purposes of these investigations are to more closely observe sand movement, which is normally hidden by water collected in the area and to determine in advance, effects of possible measures to fix the problem.

The best long term solution has not yet been determined. But it will ensure that the levee is restored to its authorized level of protection. The decision will be the result of investigations currently ongoing. Engineers are simultaneously preparing to take any steps necessary if there should be a rise in the river that would cause associated risks to become unacceptable while they are conducting investigations and planning.