



# NEWS RELEASE

**U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS**

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## **Melvin Price Main Lock “Iced”**

**Alton, IL** – The main 1200-foot lock chamber at the Melvin Price Locks and Dam south of Alton, Ill., had to be closed early this morning due to ice accumulation that was preventing proper operating of the giant lift gate at the lock’s upstream end.

Record levels of ice have slowed locking operations there but until now have not stopped them. A combination of hard work on the part of U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, St. Louis District personnel at the lock and large scale navigation industry cooperation to keep the channel open has sustained operations.

Ice accumulating and moving down stream has had to be “flushed” through the main lock chamber to keep it open. But at 2 a.m. Friday morning, ice formed a “gorge” or large accumulation that prevented the lift gates that open and close the upstream end of the lock from operating properly.

To restore the lock to full operation, emergency bulkheads were lowered into position to cut off the river flow and enable St. Louis District employees to realign the three gate sections. That operation was completed at about 7:30 a.m. Work to remove the bulkheads, which span the 110-foot wide lock chamber, is currently underway and Corps of Engineers experts expect the lock to be back in full operation not later than 2 p.m. today.

At this time, 11 barge tows are laid up along the river bank downstream of the Mel Price facility awaiting operations to restart. Three industry vessels have continued to work in together above the locks to maintain the channel up to and into the Illinois River.

The auxiliary 600-foot chamber at the Mel Price Locks and Dam remains out of operation due to ice accumulation.

Andy Schimpf, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, St. Louis District Navigation Business Line Manager reports that ice conditions are the worst they have been in 20 years. Schimpf credits hard work under difficult conditions by lock employees and unprecedented cooperation by several commercial navigation companies that have taken turns breaking ice and maintaining a safe channel for each other with sustaining operations. The Corps of Engineers and navigation interests work in close cooperation to sustain navigation from and to the Illinois River as a critical economic function for the region.

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### **2-2-2-2 Mel Price Iced**

During 2009, the Mel Price Locks moved more than 7,000 vessels with a total of more than 54,000 barges in both directions. These vessels carried some 56 million tons of cargo, including more than 31 million tons of farm products, mostly to for export overseas. More than 60 percent of the nation's agricultural farm commodities move on barges traveling on the Mississippi River. Other major cargoes include crude materials such as stone, chemicals, petroleum products and coal.

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