

## COAST GUARD DISCUSSES ITS ROLE IN U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS AQUATIC NUISANCE SPECIES DISPERSAL BARRIER PROJECT

CLEVELAND - Members of the Great Lakes community have expressed interest in the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' project to design, construct, and operate an electric Aquatic Nuisance Species Dispersal Barrier in the Chicago and Sanitary Ship Canal to prevent the spread of invasive species either in or out of the Great Lakes.

In an effort to help members of the community understand this complex project, and the Coast Guard's role in its safe operation, we've posted several informative documents to the Coast Guard's Ninth District public affairs website at:

<http://www.d9publicaffairs.com/go/doctype/443/29566/>

Additionally, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers have dedicated a website to the fish barrier project, which can be found at:

<http://www.lrc.usace.army.mil/projects/fish%5Fbarrier/>

Recent media reports about the electric fish barrier in the Chicago and Sanitary Ship Canal raised concerns about the efforts of the Army Corps of Engineers and the U.S. Coast Guard to manage the process of activating a new replacement barrier.

These reports raise public awareness of threats to our valuable Great Lakes ecosystem. However, the reporting on Army Corps' electric fish barrier project has not clearly presented the role of the Coast Guard in this complex process.

In 2002 the Army Corps energized a "demonstration" barrier at one-volt per inch to prevent the movement of aquatic nuisance species through the canal. In 2006, the Army Corps completed construction of the new "Barrier IIA" designed to operate continuously at one-volt per inch, and at higher levels after testing is completed to determine optimal operating levels.

These fish barriers bisect a commercial waterway with a high volume of commercial and recreational traffic. To protect human life and the property of waterway users, this first-of-its-kind project requires extraordinary safety testing and public outreach prior to full operation.

Media reports suggested confusion over agency approval authorities for the operation of these barriers. The Army Corps' mandate is to construct and operate the barrier; the Coast Guard's mandate is to ensure such operation does not pose undue risk or hazard to waterway users. These are complementary roles and the agencies have consistently worked together to conduct safety tests and public outreach.

Delays have occurred due to the discovery of significant safety hazards not anticipated during project design. A comprehensive, independent analysis conducted in 2008 at the one-volt per inch level found a serious risk of injury or death to persons immersed in the water over the barrier. Much effort has gone into developing mitigation measures in

coordination with stakeholders. Operating the barrier at four-volts per inch (the maximum capacity) presents a higher risk; there is not yet data to indicate how much higher. Additionally, sparking between barges transiting the barrier (a risk to flammable cargoes) occurred at the one-volt level. The Coast Guard and Army Corps developed regulations and safety guidelines, with stakeholder input, which have eliminated further sparking at the one-volt level.

Given these risks, the Army Corps agreed not to energize the new barrier at the one-volt level until they received Coast Guard comment on December 15, 2008. The Army Corps further agreed not to increase voltage without additional safety testing and Coast Guard comment. Of note, the demonstration barrier has at all times been operating as designed, helping prevent the spread of nuisance species.

Media reports have also criticized the length of time it is taking for testing and new barrier activation and have implied that certain viewpoints have not been heard. In addition to delays for necessary safety testing and hazard elimination, the Coast Guard is required to notify the public and accept comments prior to implementing new safety regulations. At all points in the process, there has been extensive involvement of stakeholders. A Fish Barrier Advisory Panel that includes local, state, and federal agencies; environmental and academic groups; private organizations; and commercial towing and fishing representatives ensures that competing interests and viewpoints are considered as this complex project advances. Panel minutes can be found at <http://www.seagrant.wisc.edu/AIS/Default.aspx?tabid=451>. The upcoming January 8, 2009 Panel meeting will report on the completed safety tests and the Army Corps' plans for testing at increased voltages (early 2009).

While there are many competing scientific views on preventing the spread of aquatic nuisance species, the USCG recognizes the potential need to increase barrier voltage quickly if juvenile fish are detected. Even though testing at increased voltages has not been completed, we are prepared to temporarily but immediately close the waterway to vessel traffic to allow the barriers to operate at higher voltage levels. This action would, however, have regional economic impacts -- 17.7 million tons of cargo pass through the waterway annually; the equivalent of 162,000 rail cars or 708,000 semi trucks.

The electric fish barrier illustrates the challenges faced in ensuring safety, security and environmental protection while balancing the oftentimes-conflicting needs of multiple public and private interest groups. The Coast Guard is committed to public safety and environmental protection and will continue to work closely and openly with all stakeholders. We encourage those interested in our role to visit <http://www.d9publicaffairs.com/go/doctype/443/29566/>.

By Captain David Callahan, Ninth Coast Guard District Chief of Staff