

YOUR GOVERNMENT AT WORK

New Orleans floodwalls stuffed with newspaper?

Witness: Builder said 'when Congress sent down the money, it would be repaired the proper way'
WorldNetDaily 4/27/08

Some New Orleans residents are questioning whether the millions spent to repair levees and floodwalls in the wake of 2005's devastation from Hurricane Katrina has made their city any safer after



Collapsed floodwall, New Orleans

a witness to the recent construction revealed expansion joints between floodwall panels had been filled with newspaper instead of the rubber foam called for in the project's specifications.

New Orleans CBS affiliate WWL-TV visited a section of floodwall in St. Bernard Parish with a resident who asked not to be identified and who showed the news crew a section of floodwall where he had observed the contractor filling the openings between the walls with newspaper during repairs in 2006.

"The whole length of the wall was stuffed with newspaper," the resident said.

Because the concrete in the floodwall expands and contracts with temperature and humidity, the barrier is made of many separate panels, each separated by a half-inch gap, to prevent cracking and buckling.

The gap, or expansion joint, is filled with a series of barriers to prevent water from passing through. The primary barrier is the "waterstop," a thin piece of rubber that runs from top to bottom between two panels and is anchored in the concrete foundation. On both sides of the waterstop is a rubber foam material that fills the gap out to the surface of the floodwall. Finally, a third material covers and seals the gap on both sides of the floodwall.

In the section of St. Bernard Parish floodwall, the work crews used newspaper for the second rubber foam barrier. WWL-TV cameras even captured the date May 21, 2006, on a page of the Parade maga-

zine from the Times-Picayune.

"It's like putting a Band-Aid on the hole of a gas tank of an airplane," the resident said.

He went on to say he had confronted the contractor who blamed Washington for the way the job was being done.

"He basically told me when Congress sent down the money, it would be repaired the proper way."

The \$2 million contract to raise and repair the floodwall section refers to "field molded sealants" at least four times, the same sponge rubber material that should have been used to fill the cavity in the expansion joints. According to New Orleans engineer Subhash Kulkarni, the rubber material was contractually required for the repair project.

"I would say they have not met their obligation to install the joint correctly. They haven't installed it at all," Kulkarni said.

"I cannot even comprehend that somebody would stuff some newspaper in there. They

should have done a better job than what you see here."

While Kulkarni said the newspaper did not present an immediate risk, over time it could lead to a weakening of the waterstop because the rubber foam is not there to keep foreign objects out.

"It could be very serious," he said. "It doesn't take a lot of stress to cause the failure of these floodwalls. We don't know after two or three years how the main joint will perform. This is the first line of defense."

Corps spokesman Kevin Wagner dismissed Kulkarni's concerns.

"If you look at the repairs we made to the joints, there's not really a safety issue with the joints at all," said Wagner.

When asked if there was any shoddy work involved, Wagner said, "I don't think so at all."

Yesterday, representatives of the Army Corps of Engineers held a news conference beside the 15-foot Harvey Canal flood wall to clarify the agency's repair procedures to keep water from seeping through the expansion joints.

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Floodwalls Stuffed with Newspaper

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Sand boil at floodwall expansion joint, New Orleans

Saying the use of newspaper instead of rubber foam was only a "temporary solution" applied in three panel gaps, Maj. Timothy Kurgan, chief public affairs officer for the Corps' New Orleans district, acknowledged that it was "not the preferred technique."

"You had a lot of work being done to get things

up to snuff after Hurricane Katrina. I don't want people thinking there's just a bunch of newspaper inside this wall, and that's the only thing keeping water out," he told the Times-Picayune.

Kurgan also disputed the claim that a contractor had put in the newspaper filling, saying the work was done by Corps employees.

"It's an indictment against

the quality of work being done," said St. Bernard parish president Craig Tafaro.

"Would they let a contractor put Play-Doh in the place of mortar when they put bricks on their house? No, I don't think so."

McCain Differs With Bush on Climate Change

By ELISABETH BUMILLER and JOHN M. BRODER, The New York Times 5/13

PORTLAND, Ore. — Senator John McCain sought to distance himself from President Bush on Monday as he called for a mandatory limit on greenhouse gas emissions in the United States to combat climate change.

McCain called for more action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Mr. McCain, in a speech at a wind power company, also pledged to work with the European Union to diplomatically engage China and India, two of the world's biggest polluters, if they refuse to participate in an international agreement to slow global warming.

In the prepared text of his speech, e-mailed to reporters on Sunday night and Monday morning, Mr. McCain went so far as to call for punitive tariffs against China and India if they evaded international standards on emissions, but he omitted the threat in his delivered remarks. Aides said he had decided to soften his language because he thought he could be misinterpreted as being opposed to free trade, a central tenet of his campaign and Republican orthodoxy.

But he took a shot at Mr. Bush.

"I will not shirk the mantle of leadership that the United States bears," Mr. McCain said pointedly. "I will not permit eight long years to pass without serious action on serious challenges."

In speeches on the campaign trail, Mr. McCain frequently highlights the threat of climate change, but he has a mixed record on the environment in the Senate. In recent years he has pushed legislation to curb emissions that contribute to climate change, but he has missed votes on toughening fuel economy standards and has opposed tax breaks meant to encourage alternative energy.

In his address on Monday, Mr. McCain, the presumptive Republican presidential nominee, renewed his support for a "cap-and-trade" system in which power plants and other polluters could meet limits on heat-trapping gases like carbon dioxide by either reducing emissions on their own or buying credits from more efficient producers.

Mr. McCain's break with the Bush administration means that the three main presidential candidates have embraced swifter action to fight global warming.



Pool photo by Bruce Ely

Senator John McCain, second from left, toured the Vestas Wind Energy Training Facility in Portland, Ore., on Monday. Mr.

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