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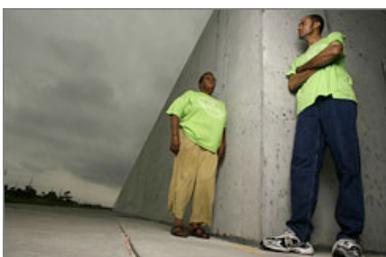


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# Tracking recovery in New Orleans

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By Sean Gardner for USA TODAY

Pam Dashiell, left, and Charles Allen of the Holy Cross Neighborhood Association stand in front of the levee wall built in the Lower 9th Ward after Hurricane Katrina in 2005.

## Time, money press La. storm project

By Rick Jervis, USA TODAY

NEW ORLEANS — Despite new flood walls and re-strengthened levees, some of the areas most devastated by Hurricane Katrina remain perilously exposed to a repeat of the 2005 disaster, according to city leaders and hurricane experts.

Chief among the concerns, as hurricane season approaches, are money and time. The \$14.6 billion hurricane protection system covering 350 miles around New Orleans may not be ready by its projected 2011 completion date, if funds are not delivered in time.

"It seems a little optimistic that all this work will be completed by 2011," says Garret Graves, director of Louisiana Gov. Bobby Jindal's Office of Coastal Activity. "The state is a little concerned that (the Army Corps of Engineers) won't meet the schedule."

**VIDEO: Doctors fear formaldehyde from FEMA trailers could harm Katrina survivors**

The corps insists that the greater New Orleans area is safer today that it was when Hurricanes Katrina and Rita slammed into the region more than two years ago, creating the costliest disaster in U.S. history.

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A report last month by the American Society of Civil Engineers said the Army corps should be more direct with the public about potential problems and risks. Particularly at risk could be the Lower 9th Ward and neighboring St. Bernard Parish.

Congress directed the corps to repair the damage done by Katrina and build a new protection system of flood walls, armored levees, floodgates and barriers to withstand a 100-year storm, or those with a 1% chance of occurring in any year. Katrina was a 396-year storm.

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Some of the challenges confronting the project:

**Money.** U.S. lawmakers still haven't fully approved \$5.8 billion needed to complete the project. If Congress doesn't approve the money by the end of the summer, it likely won't reach the corps until next year, delaying the project by at least a year, says Karen Durham-Aguilera, director of the corps's Task Force Hope, which is leading the project. State and local municipalities also have been asked to contribute \$1.8 billion in a match, which local

leaders say will be difficult to do.

**Clay.** The corps is still exploring ways to get more of the earthen clay needed to armor the levees. More than 50 million cubic yards of the clay is still needed, says Col. Jeffrey Bedey, head of the corps' Hurricane Protection Office in New Orleans.

**Size.** The sheer scope of the project has forced the corps into new ways of operating, including incorporating input from community and industry leaders. This makes for a longer, but better, process, says Durham-Aguilera, who oversaw corps projects in Iraq before moving to New Orleans. "This process is at a level I've never seen anyplace I've ever worked," she says.

In April, the corps took the unusual step of awarding a nearly \$700 million "design-build" contract to the Shaw Group, a Baton Rouge-based engineering firm, to build a storm barrier near Lake Borgne, southeast of New Orleans. A 28-foot storm surge rushed through the area during Katrina, ravaging St. Bernard Parish, the Lower 9th Ward and New Orleans East.

Design-build contracts allow the contractors to design as they go, allowing them to adjust for unexpected situations. It is the biggest design-build contract in corps history, Bedey says.

But as the corps proceeds toward the 100-year storm protection system, some areas are being protected faster than others.

For example, massive temporary pumps were installed at the mouths of the city's drainage canals at the shore of Lake Pontchartrain, which will lock down during a storm and prevent another massive flood in that part of the city, Bedey says. The Industrial Canal, a bigger canal that pushed water into the Lower 9th Ward and St. Bernard during Katrina, remains open. Work on that canal won't begin until next year, he says.

"We're in a marathon and a marathon's a long race," Bedey notes. "There's nothing pretty about being in a marathon, whether you're watching it or running it."

In April, a panel with the American Society of Civil Engineers praised the work the corps had so far done in strengthening levees and putting up stronger flood walls. But it also warned the agency not to "sugarcoat" existing dangers.

The risk "to citizens in the New Orleans area with the current hurricane protection system is much higher than would be accepted for many other engineered life-protection systems," the society said.

Until the Lake Borgne barrier and another floodgate at the Industrial Canal are completed, areas remain exposed to storm surges, says Mark Davis, director of Tulane University's Institute on Water Resources Law and Policy.

"The real question is the Lower 9th Ward and St. Bernard Parish," he says. "It's not just one community. It's the entire eastern side of New Orleans."

The lack of immediate protection has homeowners worried, some of whom only recently returned to rebuild their homes, says Pam Dashiell, past president of the Holy Cross Neighborhood Association, a historic neighborhood just south of the Lower 9th Ward.

"It's very disconcerting," Dashiell says. "It has a lot of folks here concerned."

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Posted 5/27/2008 10:06 PM

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**Comments: (28)** Showing:

 **CrescentCityRay** wrote: 5/29/2008 4:00:12 PM



My family has lived here since 1765. We live in Lakeview in New Orleans and because of engineering negligence by the US Army Corps of Engineers, levees collapsed without even being overtopped and our home was flooded with seven feet of water. The same thing happened to everyone in our zip code plus about a dozen or so other zip codes. We rebuilt our home with the living area well above the Katrina flood line and well above sea level. We deserve adequate flood protection.

There was nothing wrong with our local levee maintenance and 92% of us evacuated before the storm.

I am very disenfranchised by the inactions of every level of government and by the lack of respect by many fellow US citizens. You should recognize that 1/4th of domestic oil is produced here, our port ships more tonnage than any other port on the continent and half of the lower 48's seafood production comes from here. If you feel South Louisiana should not be inhabited then you should invite us to secede from the Union, because we have no intention of living anywhere else. You need us much worse than we need you. We deserve our recovery.

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ZChen wrote: 5/28/2008 2:51:11 PM

Hey folks, One Economy Corporation, a DC nonprofit, has launched an emergency preparedness section on its Beehive website to help low-income people prepare for emergencies such as storms, hurricanes, tornadoes and floods. It is extremely helpful and educational: [www.thebeehive.org](http://www.thebeehive.org)

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wildkit wrote: 5/28/2008 12:22:20 PM

Just checked back and find that as the day wears on, the comments get more and more off the wall, with posters trying to set up straw men they can attack. Use some common sense, people! With creativity, port facilities for the mouth of the Mississippi could be preserved without pouring money wastefully into attempts to protect lowlying areas for residential use. It is true that many of our cities and shoreside recreational/resort regions along both the Gulf of Mexico and the Atlantic Ocean are vulnerable to hurricane damage ... those who choose to be there should pay whatever insurance premiums are necessary to protect their interests, or swallow the risk ... as should New Orleans residents and business owners in relatively higher elevations. But simple common sense dicatates that huge expenditures of tax money NOT be used in futile attempts to hurricane-proof the lowest-lying parts of New Orleans, which should never have been occupied in the first place. I have always enjoyed visiting New Orleans and appreciate that city's contributions to the culture of our nation; but that would not be an excuse for pouring hundreds of millions of dollars into that city or any other in attempts to carry out the kind of foolish plans that have been advanced for New Orleans. There are parts of New Orleans where building levees would be like building levees near the mouth of a volcano. Nice thought, but not real smart.

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genmil1 wrote: 5/28/2008 12:11:58 PM

Dudes, if you live below sea level you have one heck of a good chance of getting flooded.

Anyone that wanted to move out of these areas has been given the opportunity to be bought out.

The one's staying have made the choice.

There are plenty of good homesites around New Orleans, above sea level, for everyone that does not want to become a "victim".

We can't tell people where to live because we can't fix stupid, it just happens.

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prerunner wrote: 5/28/2008 11:38:58 AM

Also, folks. New York City now sits in the hurricane corridor and a Category 2 hurricane would decimate the city. Will you all be so quick to talk about abandoning it?

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prerunner wrote: 5/28/2008 11:37:03 AM

For the last three commentors, get your facts straight. Only some parts of the city are below sea level. Fact is that NO is the only deep water port on the Mississippi River. Sure we could abandon the city, but be prepared for a much higher cost for fuel and consumer goods, one of the most cultural cities in this country (MidWest Guy2, judging by your name, you are only familiar with bland and boring). Take all of this into consideration as this country rolls toward losing it's status as a

global power.

If you don't like your tax dollars being spent on the city of New Orleans, then suck it up. That money will be spent there as the city is important to the nations infrastructure and the country has to send aid to keep itself intact.

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basstbone wrote: 5/28/2008 11:34:46 AM

"I have lived in NOLA 50 years and have YET to flood. I live ABOVE sea level."  
=====

Then you are in a minority - you're smart enough to have your home on higher ground.

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basstbone wrote: 5/28/2008 11:32:17 AM

Question for the masses: Which major insurance companies are still writing property coverage in New Orleans, and at what price (premium costs)? Seems to me that after Hurricane Andrew decimated Florida, insurance premiums went sky-high.

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Coastalman wrote: 5/28/2008 11:32:04 AM

listen wrote: 22m ago  
<http://www.commondreams.org/headlines06/0112-15.htm>

Check out above page. Does the USA have capable engineers and construction companies, or, are we inferior to other countries.

I have lived in NOLA 50 years and have YET to flood. I live ABOVE sea level. We have catholic high schools older than the USA. This city has survived hundreds of years and is actually better off today then pre Katrina. Since Katrina, the sense of community is like no other in the country. The demographics has changed, but that is a good thing. More working people earning their way. We WILL survive and thrive.

=====  
And it will always be there. You're talking about a multi-billion dollar shipping industry annually in that port city. I lived there 25 years myself (working for the Corps). Loved every minute of it. It ain't going away.

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MidWest Guy2 wrote: 5/28/2008 11:20:40 AM

There have been whole towns that have moved because of flooding along the Mississippi. Seems some people are smarter than others. After being flooded every 20 years, you would think someone with brains would figure it out.

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