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### ***Advocate - Baton Rouge, La.***

#### **Levee review panel sees organization needs**

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#### Levee review panel sees organization needs

Although a Corps of Engineers team is on track with its investigation into why levees in New Orleans failed during Hurricane Katrina, there are organizational issues emerging that also need to be addressed, according to a scientific review team headed by the American Society of Civil Engineers.

The issues cited by the 14-member review team are:

A lack of one responsible party for the southeast Louisiana hurricane protection system.

A lack of a systemwide design for protection.

A need to evaluate how the system is designed.

A need to design levees that can withstand being overtopped by storm surge.

The panel, in a report issued Monday, notes that no one person or organization is in charge of the hurricane protection system and, even within the corps, there are different levels of responsibility for the system.

Concerns about the hurricane protection system start with the fact that the system wasn't designed and built as a unit. Instead, the system evolved over time.

That might explain why connections between storm-protection structures such as those between levee structures and earthen levees had multiple failures throughout southeast Louisiana during Hurricane Katrina, according to the review teams report.

No matter how high the levees are built, a possibility always remains of a hurricane causing a surge elevation that is even higher than the one for which the levees were designed, the report says.

The team also is evaluating the Jan. 10 initial report on the levee failures issued by the corps Interagency Performance Evaluation Task Force.

Were satisfied with their progress to date, said David Daniel, the review panel chairman and president of the University of Texas at Dallas.

IPETs scope is primarily to look at factual information on why the system performed as it did, Daniel said. The larger, organizational issues brought up by the review panel would likely need to be reviewed by a different governmental body or agency.

The corps is only one piece of this wheel, Daniel said.

Getting Congress to deal with these issues might make more sense, he said.

For instance, the issue of armoring levees would likely need congressional consideration since its Congress, not the corps, that appropriates the funds to build the structures.

Daniel noted that the scientists and engineers who serve on the review panel didn't feel they are the most qualified to say who should examine these issues.

Ed Link, project director for IPET, praised the review panel for its report and for its comments received throughout the process.

Link said he agrees that the four points brought up by the review panel are important, but they are beyond what IPET has been asked to study. IPET was organized late last year to look at the physical reasons the levees failed to hold up during Hurricane Katrina.

We have a huge, huge job to do, this analysis of the physical system, in the time that we have, Link said. There's just not enough time to include the organizational concerns as

well, he said.

IPET is expected to have a completed report by June 1.

In Mondays report, the review panel also cautioned that corps personnel should be more careful about predicting that New Orleans will be safe after levee repairs are completed by June 1, Daniel said.

The corps review group is looking into potential risk assessments and, until that review is complete, such predictions give an appearance of deciding the conclusion before the investigation, he said.

Link said the corps has done risk analysis for structures, but applying that method to hurricanes is more difficult.

Its not a simple thing to apply risk to an environment like this, Link said. Nevertheless, the analysis needs to be done so the public has an understanding of their level of risk as they move back into the area.

They need to understand clearly the level of protection that is provided and how that will change in the future, Link said.

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