



US Army Corps
of Engineers®

STATEMENT

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Army Corps Responds to Washington Post Article

The Washington Post article in the May 14th edition, "Par for the Corps," by Michael Grunwald, is unfortunately full of errors, undocumented claims, and misrepresentations.

Its inflammatory rhetoric exploits the suffering of the Gulf Coast by minimizing the true impact of Hurricane Katrina. While Katrina was a Category 3 storm in terms of wind speed when it made landfall on August 29, only 24 hours earlier it was the largest Category 5 storm on record in the Gulf of Mexico, generating storm surges within the Gulf at over 28 feet.

Although the wind speed dropped, the surge still came, making this the largest natural disaster to ever strike the nation.

The article continues with a shotgun approach, criticizing Congress, the Administration, and State and local sponsors of water resource projects around the nation, leaving the reader wondering how one can have such widespread animosity.

From the time the effects of Hurricane Katrina were first known, Corps of Engineers leaders have consistently told the American public that the Corps is accountable for the projects it builds and administers. No one is more concerned about the levee and floodwall breaches, nor more determined to know how these breaches occurred, than the Corps. We have approached our investigations deliberately and openly, have shared all data and information widely, and have sought not the first answer, but the right answer. We are determined to ensure we are doing the right thing now and in the future as we repair and rebuild these structures.

The Chief of Engineers has commissioned an Interagency Performance Evaluation Task Force (IPET) consisting of approximately 150 engineers, scientists and other experts from government, academia, and industry across the nation and world to investigate the hurricane protection system performance during Katrina. IPET's analysis has been thorough and upon completion of review by the American Society of Engineers and the National Academy of Sciences will guide the Corps' ongoing and future work in New Orleans, as well as advance the practice of civil engineering for other public and private projects.

The Corps is awaiting the publication of the final IPET report to provide the conclusive, detailed analysis of the hurricane protection system's performance during Katrina. The analysis to date has demonstrated that much of the early speculation about the performance of the system was wrong and there is still much to be learned.

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Regrettably, “Par for the Corps” is a rehash of personal opinions about past events without considering steps undertaken by the Corps in recent years to continuously improve and to ensure all projects are accomplished in conformity with the highest standards.

The Corps has strengthened its analytical capabilities and ensures all projects undergo extensive analysis and multiple reviews before forwarding its recommendations to the Administration and Congress. We have enhanced training in project planning, emphasized senior leadership review, and update planning guidance to better balance environmental and social needs with economic justification. We also subject large, complex, and potentially controversial project proposals to review by outside experts to better inform federal decision making.

The Corps doesn’t have the choice to sit on the sidelines and criticizing others; we are committed to action on behalf of the citizens of the Gulf Coast and the Nation. Our work is important, difficult, and sensitive. As such, we understand that many of our actions are subject to intense scrutiny.

We welcome constructive criticism and recognize the best decisions are the product of full and open debate. Although some critics refuse, we ask all of them to join us in providing balanced water resource solutions for our fellow citizens. And we thank all those who participate productively.