

Hurricane Gustav Reveals Gap in Otherwise Successful Marine Industry Preparations

FRIENDSWOOD, Texas, Sept. 22 (SEND2PRESS NEWSWIRE) – According to the Gulf Intracoastal Canal Association, the Coast Guard, Corps of Engineers and inland barge industry have collaborated extensively since the 2005 hurricane season to better prepare for and respond to hurricane events along the Gulf Coast. Specifically, the collaboration produced a detailed, written protocol for storm preparation, communications and response efforts as they pertain to the marine industry, including rigid procedures for evacuating vessels in advance of a storm, or securing vessels in-place when evacuation is not feasible. The protocol proved effective during Hurricane Gustav, with the exception of isolated incidents inside the Inner Harbor Navigation Canal (IHNC).



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In the New Orleans area, the hurricane protocol originally focused on the vulnerable reach of the Lower Mississippi River below the Port of New Orleans. Knowing that a planned closure of the IHNC Lock in the summer of 2008 could pose additional challenges to the marine industry's storm preparation and evacuation efforts, the Corps of Engineers and Coast Guard

called for a special meeting with the inland barge industry in the spring of 2008 to address potential problems.

During Hurricane Gustav, three vessels that were docked in the Inner Harbor Navigation Canal broke from their moorings, posing potential threat to nearby structures. These vessels were not in active service, and were not owned by any company actively involved in maritime commerce. It is presumed these vessels had been decommissioned and were destined for scrap. A thorough investigation will determine the ownership of these vessels and the reasons why they failed to remain secured during the storm.

Of all the inland barge vessels that were in active service and located within the New Orleans jurisdiction of protocol as Hurricane Gustav approached, ninety-five percent complied with advisories to evacuate the area, and none remained in the IHNC during the storm. As a result, virtually no damage was inflicted by loose barges that were in active service on this reach of the waterway.

The Coast Guard, Corps of Engineers and inland barge industry went to great lengths to anticipate all sources of risk in the IHNC and address them in advance of the IHNC Lock closure in August, including specific procedures and limitations for securing vessels in the IHNC during a storm. There was obviously a failure inside the IHNC during Hurricane Gustav, and pending conclusion of the investigation, additional measures will be developed in order to avoid recurrence of this event.

The GICA was established in 1905 to promote the concept of a single channel connecting all major Gulf Coast ports. The Gulf Intracoastal Waterway was completed in 1949 as a result of a major collaborative effort. Today, the GICA is the only organization focused on promotion, protection and maintenance of the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway.

For further information, visit: www.gicaonline.com.

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