

## ‘Mud Lump’ Leads To Damage At Nola Wharf

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Waterways Journal Weekly  
Vol. 122 No. 15  
July 14, 2008

After declaring an “extreme public emergency,” the commissioners at the Port of New Orleans were able to work quickly through the bid process to secure a contract to repair damage to the Napoleon Avenue wharf. The pilot who was docking the MSC Turchia on June 2 reported he believed the ship hit a mud lump and caused it to veer as it was approaching the dock. Instead of landing flat on the fendering, the bow of the ship landed first, causing damage to the fender pilings and load-bearing pilings under the dock surface.

Chris Bonura, the port’s manager of corporate communications, said the mud lump was probably caused by the recent high waters on the Mississippi River.

“The location was regularly surveyed by the Corps of Engineers before the incident and the depth was fine,” he told *The Waterways Journal*. “But these areas can shoal up quickly during high water.” The Corps conducts daily surveys of water depths on the Lower Mississippi River because of the propensity of shoaling, particularly during high-water events.

The location of the mud lump was more than 100 feet from the face of the dock but not in the recognized channel. The port is required to dredge from the dock out 100 feet, Bonura explained. The Corps is responsible for maintaining the channel depth.

While the Water Resources Development Act of 2007 included wording that would require the Corps to

maintain any area between the 100-foot line and the channel, Bonura said in addition to dealing with the high water, there was not enough time for the Corps to put contracts in place to include dredging the bottom between the 100-foot line and the channel.

The port’s dredge Bleakly is not able to handle the mud lump. A new 24-inch cutterhead dredge, currently being built by the port to replace the Bleakley, will be able to handle that kind of dredging to remove the mud lump, but will not be ready in time to deal with the issue. That forced the port to contract for the private company dredging.

The damage to the dock was about 400 feet from its downriver end. Crane 7, one of the four on the dock, was situated downstream of the damaged area at the time of the incident and cannot be moved on its rails past the structural damage because pilings supporting the dock surface were affected.

Only one of the 47 vessels that have used the dock in the month since the incident had to wait, Bonura said. The dock extends 2,500 feet upriver from the damage.

“It required a lot of coordination between the terminal operators and the port’s berthing department,” he said. “Ships were reassigned dock positions to keep Crane 7 working. We have a pretty amazing berthing department.” Depending on their size, as many as four vessels can be berthed at the dock at one time.

A \$1.9 million contract was awarded to Weeks Marine to dredge the area in the vicinity of the mud lump.

A separate contract, valued at \$753,425 and subject of the emergency declaration, was awarded to

**Kostmayer Construction** of Slidell, LA to remove the damaged deck, replace pilings, then replace the deck, he said. **Kostmayer** was one of three companies bidding on the job. The port requested bids from six companies with which it had previous experience.

Repairs will be complicated by a port requirement that work be done by barge from the water side so as not to interfere with terminal operations.

In addition to the dock project, the commissioners were told the port general cargo tonnage was down 26 percent for the first four months of the year. Bonura attributed it mostly to the decline in imported steel, based largely on the weak dollar.

“With a weak dollar, steel importers tend to allow their inventory to be reduced,” he said. “Once those inventories get low, steel importers will have to make the decision to begin importing again, even if the weak dollar has driven up prices.”

He said the port has been working to diversify its products portfolio to weather the hills and valleys associated with the cycles in various markets. Expecting some downturn because of the weakening dollar, he said the port “held the line on expenses” in this year’s budget.

Port commissioners also authorized Gary LaGrange, the port’s president and chief executive officer, to enter into a lease agreement with Orleans Boat Storage and Fishing Camp Center, LLC, for some property that had been vacant near the New Orleans Cold Storage facility.