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Buffalo District  
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January 29, 2008

# NEWS RELEASE

Release No. 08-03

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## **Corps Announces Enhancement of Public Involvement Program for the Lake Ontario Ordnance Works Site**

**BUFFALO, NY--**The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Buffalo District (the Corps), is announcing a decision to improve the public involvement program for the former Lake Ontario Ordnance Works (LOOW) Site and Niagara Falls Storage Site (NFSS) located in the Towns of Lewiston and Porter, NY. “We’re taking this opportunity to ensure we provide the community with a wide range of opportunities for public participation in our projects,” stated Lieutenant Colonel John S. Hurley, Buffalo District Commander. As part of this enhancement the Commander has decided to assess stakeholder interest in establishing an official Department of Defense (DoD) Restoration Advisory Board (RAB) for the Corps’ environmental investigations of past Federal impacts at these sites.

The objective of a DoD RAB is to create a forum for exchanging information between the community and the Corps regarding its environmental restoration projects. DoD RABs are one of many methods for the public to engage the Corps and offer a focused, interactive opportunity for discussing community concerns related to Corps projects. The DoD establishes RABs in accordance with the Federal RAB Rule (32 CFR 202) enacted in May 2006. Since 2003 the Corps has been working with a community-based volunteer group which is independent from the Corps.

“We appreciate the dedicated efforts of the current community-based volunteer group, respect their concerns and their spirit of volunteerism,” said Lieutenant Colonel Hurley. “Together we have made some positive progress in responding to many community concerns regarding the Corps’ projects on the sites.” Since 2003, the Corps has invested a large share of its available outreach resources in one unique element of the Corps’ community involvement program – the citizen-led group. However, the District has a responsibility to comply with applicable DoD regulations and the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act (CERCLA) public involvement requirements.

Lieutenant Colonel Hurley recently met with representatives of the community-based volunteer group to respond to their questions regarding the status, funding, and authority of their group. “They are not an official DoD RAB,” said Hurley. “In 2003, a decision was made to form and lead an organization independent from the Corps. In 2006 Federal regulations were enacted to implement best practices for the DoD to organize and run a RAB. We must now bring our program into compliance with Federally established regulations.”

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Regarding DoD RAB funding, Lieutenant Colonel Hurley clarified that the Corps is authorized to expend Federal project funds on administrative activities when the Corps organizes a DoD RAB as an official element of its public involvement program.

The Corps will determine whether there is enough community interest to support establishing a DoD RAB such as the one that existed until 2002. The Corps is required to do this every two years according to the DoD RAB regulations. The Corps expects to begin the assessment in the near future while completing other program improvements.

“If the stakeholders within the community express a desire to engage us through an official DoD RAB we will establish one,” Hurley said. If there is insufficient interest, the Buffalo District Commander will publish a decision that its public involvement program for LOOW and NFSS will not include a DoD RAB. “Regardless of whether there is or is not a DoD RAB,” Hurley said, “we will press on with ensuring we provide the community with many opportunities for public participation by improving the other elements of our public involvement program.”

The Corps performed a self-assessment of its public involvement program with respect to Federal requirements and found a number of areas to improve, in addition to the RAB requirements. In 2008, the Corps will invest its available public involvement resources in a diverse program of activities to include:

- Public information sessions on the NFSS Remedial Investigation Report, and future field investigations for the LOOW site;
- Improving and updating the public information repositories which provide community access to the records, reports and information used to formulate Corps environmental decisions;
- Improving and expanding the amount of information available on the internet to include frequently asked questions and key Corps reports; and
- Publishing more frequent information on upcoming opportunities for public participation.

“We must improve the entire community’s access to project records and information supporting the Corps’ environmental decisions,” said Bill Kowalewski, Program Manager for both sites. “Providing a complete and current public information repository is a legal requirement of the CERCLA.” The information repository for the LOOW and NFSS projects is located at the Town of Lewiston Public Library, 305 South 8<sup>th</sup> Street, Lewiston, NY, and the Youngstown Free Library, 240 Lockport Street, Youngstown, NY.

Additional information about the Corps’ environmental restoration projects at the LOOW and NFSS sites is available on the Buffalo District public website at <http://www.lrb.usace.army.mil/derpfuds/loow-nfss>

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