

Corps closes New Orleans canals in preparation for severe weather

NEW ORLEANS, Sept. 21 – The Army Corps of Engineers has begun closing two damaged canals at noon today in preparation for storm surges associated with Hurricane Rita.

The 17th Street canal and the London Street canals will be closed with steel sheet piling by 8 p.m. tonight and will remain closed until the threat of severe weather passes.

Steel sheets will be driven deep into the canal beds near Lake Pontchartrain, providing protection from possible storm surges from the lake rushing into the damaged canals.

The move to close the canals is part of the Corps continuing effort to provide an interim level of protection for the area that was damaged during Hurricane Katrina.

More than 800 filled sandbags are on hand, and an additional 2,500 have been ordered. Work continues around the clock to make emergency repairs to damaged canal walls and levees.

Working with local levee districts and drainage authorities, the Corps has begun re-distributing pumps, construction equipment and materials to municipalities for emergency response. Efforts continue to evaluate flood control structures in the region to determine what preventive measures can be implemented.

“In addition to materials, we have also pre-positioned contractors throughout the region to rapidly respond after severe weather,” said Col. Richard Wagenaar, commander of the Army Corps of Engineers New Orleans District.

A team of Corps experts has also been established both in New Orleans and at the regional office in Vicksburg, Miss.

Since landfall of Hurricane Katrina, the Corps has been performing detailed assessments of about 350 miles of hurricane levees and developing a comprehensive, prioritized plan to repair them and their associated pumping stations.