



News release

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Mohn makes presentation on Ike Dike to BAHEP members

BAY AREA HOUSTON, TEXAS – Jerry Mohn presented a program on the “Ike Dike” to the general membership of the Bay Area Houston Economic Partnership on July 22 at Bailey’s American Grille in Seabrook. Mohn is president of the Texas Chapter of the American Shore and Beach Preservation Association in addition to serving as vice chairman of the Galveston County Beach Erosion Task Force.

BAHEP, through its International Maritime Advisory Committee, has led the formation of the Coastal Storm Protection Alliance (CSPA), a coalition consisting of organizations, business leaders and individuals interested in evaluating storm surge protection models. The alliance is providing leadership to advance these models for further consideration and funding. One such model is termed the “Ike Dike.”

BAHEP invited Mohn to speak to its members from his unique perspective as a resident of Galveston Island as well as the many leadership roles he has held in Galveston over the years. Bob Mitchell, BAHEP president, while introducing Mohn, remarked on the importance of protecting the region from the kind of devastating storm surge created by Hurricane Ike when it passed directly over Galveston Island in the early morning hours of September 13, 2008. He stated, “This is not just a Houston / Galveston issue. It’s a national security issue. Over 46% of the nation’s jet fuel is produced on the Houston Ship Channel and around Galveston Bay. Approximately 40% of the country’s specialty chemicals and at least 25% of our gasoline are produced there as well. People ask how this project will be funded. Due to the importance of this region to national security, we believe that we can get Congress interested in this.” Mitchell noted that BAHEP, since April 16, has held 25 meetings or interviews on the subject of the Ike Dike, adding that support has been very positive thus far.

Concept developed by Dr. Bill Merrell

Mohn began his speech by crediting Dr. Bill Merrell, a professor at Texas A&M University at Galveston, for developing the Ike Dike concept shortly after the storm surge from Hurricane Ike flooded much of the region. He has known Merrell for 11 years, saw the value in the Ike Dike concept, and both Mohn and Merrell have been giving presentations on it throughout the area.

Mohn explained that Merrell developed his model based on the Rotterdam Flood Gates in The Netherlands. “It’s not going to stop the winds. It’s not going to stop the rains, but it will stop the storm surge,” he said.

Records show that a major storm hits the Houston/Galveston region every 15 to 20 years. Although Ike was a Category 2 hurricane, its sheer size created the equivalent of a Category 4 storm surge. It caused \$32 billion in damages, but, much more importantly, 102 lives were lost and 34 people remain missing.

Mohn stated that other concepts for protecting structures along the coast have been either considered or used, but they only provide temporary and inadequate protection. The Ike Dike model has been used successfully by the Dutch, and interest in it is gaining momentum throughout the region. For details on the Ike Dike proposal, a PowerPoint presentation has been posted on the TAMUG Website at <http://www.tamug.edu/CTBS/Ike%20Dike%20CTBS%20TAMUG%20Modified%2024June09.pptx>.

King adds to discussion

Bill King, former mayor of Kemah and currently chairman of the Galveston Bay Foundation, was in attendance at the BAHEP meeting. He and his wife returned recently from a trip to examine the Rotterdam Gates. He was invited to the podium to talk about his experience. King advised that it is still too early to get “wrapped around the details” of a coastal barrier. He commended both Merrell and Mohn for carrying the coastal protection idea forward but added that extensive studies need to be conducted before a final solution is decided upon. King commented that a realistic solution would probably have to extend from the Texas/Louisiana border to south of Freeport.

He also affirmed an earlier statement by Mitchell stating that economic development in the region will be affected if something isn’t done. “If we keep having events where we have 20 or 30 billion dollars of damage, people will just not be building here anymore. We consistently heard in the governor’s commission testimony from industry that they were either building things in other places or deferring investment in this area, because they were concerned about the safety of their investment,” King stated.

He also reported that studies on climate change and subsidence in this area indicate that flooding problems will only get worse. As with the Dutch, this will be an ongoing battle with the sea. Due to the enormity of the problem and the complexity of the solution, it is not something that “we will run out and do overnight,” King said. He concluded, “The likelihood is that not many of us sitting in this room will get much benefit. It’s something that we’re doing for our kids and our grandkids.”

For more information on the Ike Dike or to become involved with the CSPA, contact Dan Seal, BAHEP’s CSPA liaison.

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Jerry Mohn

The Bay Area Houston Economic Partnership is a member-driven organization that provides the leadership to stimulate regional economic development and employment in southeast Texas. Its members include more than 260 investor companies, business professionals, local governments, and educational institutions encompassing 13 cities, Galveston and Harris counties, and the Port of Houston Authority. Visit www.bayareahouston.com.

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