



**News release**

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
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## Symposium addresses storm surge and flooding defense for region

**BAY AREA HOUSTON, TEXAS** – On Sept. 15, just two days after the three-year anniversary of Hurricane Ike’s landfall in Texas, the Gulf Coast Community Protection and Recovery District (GCCPRD) and the Bay Area Houston Economic Partnership (BAHEP) presented a day-long workshop and symposium on the current efforts and prospective solutions to alleviate storm surge in Galveston Bay and the upper Texas Gulf Coast. The GCCPRD consists of the county judges from six Upper Texas Coast counties - Orange, Chambers, Jefferson, Brazoria, Galveston, and Harris. The GCCPRD was created to look at ways to provide surge protection remedies including the “Ike Dike.”

The day’s agenda included a presentation from engineers located in the Netherlands, the world leaders in storm surge suppression solutions. Held at South Shore Harbour Resort and Conference Center, the event drew 160 attendees.

The day began with opening remarks by Len Waterworth, president/CEO of Dannenbaum Engineering Corporation and a general engineering consultant to the GCCPRD. He stated, “Today we’re looking at ways to find answers. How do we protect the economic prosperity that has been given to us, and how do we build on it?”

Waterworth was followed with a presentation by Owen Parker, P.E., of Dannenbaum Engineering Corporation, who spoke on “North Texas Coastal Risk Compared to Dutch Best Practices.” He was joined in his presentation by Rick van Adrichem, a student from the Netherlands who currently interns at Dannenbaum as part of his master studies. Later in the afternoon, Parker also spoke on “Coastal Response to Hurricanes.” He noted, “The GCCPRD is a direct leadership response to the \$37 billion in damage caused by Hurricane Ike.”

A morning panel discussion included Kevin C. Martin, P.E., managing director, Iv-Infra USA, LLC; Dave Weston, vice president and department manager, HDR Engineering, Inc., and Peter Wijsman, program manager, ARCADIS U.S., Inc. Wijsman explained that the Dutch Delta Plan system has been in development for the past 60 years. He said, “A systems approach to flood protection is needed. It would be a balanced approach with hard and soft measures.”

Herman J. Gesser, III, who also gave a morning presentation, served as chief counsel and projects director to U.S. Sen. Mary L. Landrieu (D-LA) from 1998-2007. His presentation, "The Louisiana Strategy to Funding," spoke of his experience as he researched, drafted, and provided advice and counsel on legislation primarily relating to the environment, public works, and appropriations. Specifically, this included such matters as transportation and Corps of Engineers projects to include coastal restoration, flood control, hurricane protection, and navigation.

Galveston County Judge Mark Henry gave the keynote address during lunch. He said, "This is not a pie in the sky concept. We have all of the facts and figures we need. It's not a question that it will work. It's a question of how do we get there from here. All of our local, state and national leaders must work as a team and commit themselves to getting the money we need for a surge protection program."

Afternoon presentations also included those by Helen Young, deputy commissioner, Coastal Resources, Texas General Land Office, and Col. Christopher Sallese, commander, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Galveston Engineer District. Young's presentation was, "The Role of the GLO in Texas Coastal Protection." The GLO is responsible for 367 miles of Gulf beach and 3,300 miles of bay and estuarine shoreline. Young said, "We want to put money into long-term solutions, and we look at the GCCPRD as a great starting point."

Sallese reported that the Sabine pass to Galveston study has been identified for funding in FY 2012 and that a start for the coastal Texas study looks promising for FY 2013. He added, "The Galveston District continues an outreach effort to identify partners and opportunities for collaborative beneficial use of dredged material projects." In closing he stated, "When you're not improving what you have, you're not looking out for the strategic needs of the nation."

The Dutch presentation, "Building the National Will," spoke of that country's response to the 1953 flood. Dale Morris, senior economist, Royal Netherlands Embassy, commented, "Change is difficult, even in the Netherlands, when the future is uncertain and what is needed is not 100 percent clear. In the Netherlands, a national / local partnership helped to make reforms possible."

As many thousands of people have recently experienced on America's East coast, storm surge and flooding are common dangers of tropical storms and hurricanes. Jim Blackburn and Phil Bedient from Rice University's Severe Storm Prediction, Education and Evacuation from Disasters (SPEED) Center spoke on helping the region better prepare for and better defend against these dangers. Bedient gave an overview of SPEED while Blackburn reported that 1.2 million people live in the Gulf coast evacuation zone. By 2035, that number will increase by 700,000. He stated that only 1 million people can be evacuated in 36 hours. Solutions must be found. One possibility, which Blackburn endorses, would be to elevate SH-146, making it an excellent evacuation route.

Dr. William Merrell teaches the Capstone Course in the Masters of Marine Resource Management Program in the Marine Sciences Department at Texas A & M University at Galveston. His scientific work has included studies of regional and large-scale ocean physics as well as coastal processes and hurricane impacts. Merrell's interests have evolved to coastal sustainability and disaster mitigation and recovery. In particular, he is investigating the possibility of a regional surge suppression barrier for the Houston/Galveston area, the Ike Dike, with which many in the region are familiar.

Merrell explained that a major storm affects the Gulf coast every 15 years on average. He promotes a "coastal spine" that would hold back the maximum storm surge for a few hours. It would be designed for a 10,000 year storm and would not harm neighboring communities.

At seminar's end, Waterworth declared, "Protecting the Gulf coast region is a legacy for the future. You can't hand this off to somebody. What are you going to do about it?"



*Len Waterworth, president/CEO of Dannenbaum Engineering Corporation, moderated the workshop and seminar throughout the day.*

**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](http://www.bayareahouston.com).

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