

We need a plan to protect us from storm surge

By BOB MITCHELL | Posted: Thursday, June 5, 2014 12:15 am, The Galveston County Daily News



*Bob Mitchell
President
Bay Area Houston Economic Partnership*

There was a news conference Wednesday at the Sylvan Beach Pavilion. It was held to drive home the importance of raising community awareness and to help everyone realize how very vulnerable this region is to the catastrophic effects of hurricane storm surge.

Six years ago, Hurricane Ike caused a major loss of life and property — to date more than \$35 billion in damage. Protecting our families and industrial assets cannot be just one person's or one organization's responsibility.

The job is just too big, but it can be accomplished if we work together. The responsibility must belong to everyone.

For many months, the Bay Area Houston Economic Partnership has worked with a number of individuals and with Texas A&M University at Galveston to educate as many people as possible about the necessity of a storm surge suppression system for the Upper Texas Gulf Coast.

This team has reached out to a number of local cities, including the city of Galveston. It has generated positive results that have enabled TAMUG to move forward with required

studies to determine which storm surge protection system can best be utilized to protect the entire region — not just a part of it.

As an economic development organization, BAHEP seeks a solution that will protect the entire region, its businesses and its citizens. This system will create a safe location, which is conducive to further capital investment and business prosperity.

The recent charter of the Bay Area Coastal Protection Alliance was the next logical step in moving this initiative forward. Formed as a nonprofit to champion the effort to build the coastal barrier system, BACPA will facilitate the completion of the studies and, through its efforts, involve the media in this critical initiative.

There have been too many comments made and articles written about a competition between possible storm surge protection projects. That is certainly not the case from where we stand.

There is no winner or loser to be chosen. We all win when the system that best protects the entire Houston-Galveston region is built.

We need to work together, in conjunction with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, to get this accomplished.

There have also been questions about the studies underway and the potential for duplication of these studies by other organizations such as the Gulf Coast Community Protection and Recovery District.

The studies in progress are being conducted to standards that are the same as or exceed those used by the Corps of Engineers and by experts the corps would either use in its studies or accept as comparable. These studies, when completed, will only serve to expedite the bureaucratic process, not hinder it.

It's time to focus our energies on building a storm surge protection system to guard our entire region from the next big hurricane that will inevitably hit. When it does, the results will be devastating unless we all take on this responsibility now.