

## Another New Orleans? - Aging Levees in California

By Mailana Mavromatis, Esq.

With the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers ("Corps") acknowledging that the New Orleans levee system was never designed to withstand a storm of Katrina's strength, Californians are left to ponder the question: were our California Delta levees designed to withstand a substantial earthquake?

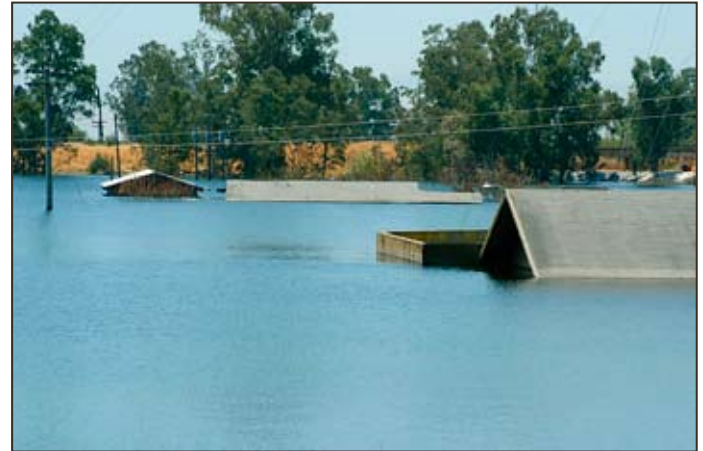
California has approximately 1,100 miles of levees that run along the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta, and the Corps has identified nearly 200 eroded sites that are in desperate need of repair – many are not far from new residential developments sitting in long established designated flood zones.

According to the Corps, most of California's levees were originally designed and constructed to protect agricultural areas from flooding. Often, they were constructed by farmers pushing up dirt with shovels and a wheelbarrow, not taking into consideration the recent surge of sprawling commercial and residential development.

A high magnitude earthquake rumbling along the Delta has the potential of breaching dozens of the aging levees that guard California's primary water transportation hub. If the Delta levees fail, the drinking water supply for two thirds of California could be threatened, and the nation's largest source of fruits and vegetables could be destroyed for months or even years.

On June 3, 2004 the Lower Jones Tract Levee in the Central Valley failed, flooding hundreds of acres and causing \$100 million in damages. It took crews 25 days, working around the clock, to fill the 500-foot breach. The breach sent hundreds of people running to higher ground and left state officials scrambling to protect the water supply for the State of California. Collapses occur in the fragile Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta levees every few years, and State officials report that a breach could begin with something as simple as an animal burrowing into the levee.

Scientists at UC Davis predicted that there is a two-in-three chance that a major earthquake or flood will hit the Delta in the next 50 years, causing widespread levee failure. In response, on September 27, 2005, Governor Schwarzenegger fired all six members of the California Reclamation Board (the flood control panel) who serve indefinite terms and were appointed



Flooding from the Upper Jones Tract Levee Break in the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta  
Picture From The State of California Department of Water Services

*"If the Delta levees fail, the drinking water supply for two thirds of California could be threatened."*

by former Governors Davis and Wilson. The new appointees are experts in engineering and represent the Central Valley.

Recently, Governor Schwarzenegger prompted California's congressional delegation to come up with over \$90 million for strengthening Central Valley levees. His budget this year increased levee maintenance by \$26 million, which reversed cuts made over the last several years.

Property I.D. and its employees have chosen to make their hurricane Katrina disaster relief contributions to the American Red Cross, an established and reliable organization. Our hearts and our prayers go out to the victims of the Katrina disaster. We ask that you take this opportunity to learn from his horrible tragedy and prepare yourselves and your loved ones for natural hazards that can occur in California. Go to [www.redcross.org](http://www.redcross.org) on tips for preparing a Family Disaster Plan and on putting together a Natural Hazard Disaster Kit for your home, car, and office. We all need to be ready for natural hazard disasters, and disclosure is the first step to preparing ourselves.

### HURRICANE DISASTER RELIEF

Please join us in helping the disaster relief effort and the hundreds of thousands affected by Hurricane Katrina.

PHONE: 1-800-HELP-NOW (435-7669)

MAIL: American Red Cross  
P.O. Box 37243  
Washington, D.C. 20013

ONLINE: [www.redcross.org](http://www.redcross.org)

