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Contact:
Lynn Rose, 313-226-4680
cell 313-300-0662
Lynn.Duerod@us.army.mil

Installation slated for new compressed air system critical to cold weather operations at Soo Locks

DETROIT – The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Detroit District, awards a \$5,279,694 contract to Brix Corp., Livonia, Mich., for construction of a compressed air distribution system at the Soo Locks in Sault Ste. Marie, Mich.

The new equipment will keep ice from forming at the lock gates through the use of an air bubbler system. The contractor will remove 1970s-era piping and compressors, which are undersized and nearing the end of their useful life, and install new piping, compressors, and related equipment. The project also includes construction of a small building on the pier between the Poe and Davis Locks to house the compressors, transformers and related equipment.

Work is scheduled to begin in September 2012 and conclude in early 2014. The project is part of the comprehensive Soo Locks Asset Renewal Plan, which defines project requirements needed to maximize reliability and reduce the risk of catastrophic failure at the Soo Locks. The plan outlines the work necessary to prevent unscheduled closures and provide reliable infrastructure through 2035.

“The Poe Lock is a critical infrastructure component, and it is imperative that we maintain it properly to keep marine commerce moving,” said Lt. Col. Robert Ells, district engineer. “The compressed air system helps extend the navigation season by protecting lock gates from ice build-up. We are pleased to award this contract to upgrade the Soo Locks, the linchpin of the Great Lakes Navigation System.”

The Corps operates and maintains the Soo Locks, which could not reliably operate without a compressed air system during the months of December, January, March, April and May. Iron ore accounts for approximately two thirds of the commodities passing through the locks; other major commodities include coal, grain, stone and fuel. An outage would greatly impact the U.S. steel industry as nearly 50 percent of the industry’s iron ore supply passes through the locks. Steel-dependent industries contribute more than 10 percent to the total U.S. Gross Domestic Product.

For more details, please contact Lynn Rose, public affairs officer, 313-226-4680; or Mollie Mahoney, project manager, at 313-226-2033.

U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS – DETROIT DISTRICT

477 Michigan Avenue
Detroit, MI 48226
www.lre.usace.army.mil