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For coal export terminal in Plaquemines Parish, Corps of Engineers says no public hearing

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The Army Corps of Engineers will not hold a public hearing before deciding whether to issue a permit for a coal export terminal in Plaquemines Parish. (*Andrea Shaw, NOLA.com|The Times-Picayune*)

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on October 01, 2014 at 12:43 PM, updated October 01, 2014 at 5:31 PM

The Army Corps of Engineers said Wednesday it will not hold a public hearing on a proposed coal export terminal in Plaquemines Parish, a setback for West Bank residents who have been clamoring in opposition to the project. Corps officials said a hearing is not required for the agency to decide whether to award a permit to **RAM Terminal** for its 600-acre site near Ironton.

"The purpose of a public hearing is to provide a venue for collecting new information that would improve the corps' ability to make a permit decision for a proposed project," said Martin Mayer, chief of the New Orleans District regulatory branch, in announcing the decision. "Based on a thorough review of the numerous comments received, we do not believe that a public hearing for the proposed project would result in the collection of information related to our regulatory authority that is not already under consideration."

The decision comes just weeks after the **Gretna City Council** and **Jefferson Parish Council** passed resolutions asking the corps to hold a public hearing on the project's effect on coastal restoration efforts. West Bank residents expressed concern the coal export terminal would bring additional train traffic into their communities.

When RAM Terminal applied for a federal permit in March 2012, corps officials said they sought public input and evaluated all information that was submitted. The corps has regulatory authority over projects that might affect navigable waters and enforces the Clean Water Act.

"Every comment received is given full consideration and evaluation to ensure that the corps is evaluating a proposed project's permit application to the best extent possible," Mayer said.

But environmental advocates point to two new developments since RAM Terminal applied for the permit. A study on the possible effects of the terminal on the Mid-Barataria sediment diversion project has been completed, and the coal export project has expanded.

"The Army Corps wants people to quiet down and let this out-of-state coal company proceed with its dust-

spewing trains and polluting coal export terminal. But their refusal to hold a public hearing doesn't change the fact that Louisianans have a right to voice their serious concerns about this project," Devin Martin of the Delta chapter of the Sierra Club.

Gretna resident Laurie Ledet said she was surprised residents will not get a chance to voice their concerns on an issue that reaches beyond Plaquemines Parish. "It is unthinkable to me that the corps is ignoring concerns from Jefferson Parish, Gretna and Westwego," Ledet said. "The proposed RAM coal export terminal would turn the West Bank into an industrial corridor, bringing pollution and endangering our health and safety.

"How does the corps know they've heard all the concerns without holding a public hearing?" Ledet asked.

Opponents implored the corps to reconsider its decision.

"Scientists with the state of Louisiana have raised serious concerns about how the RAM coal export terminal would impact one of the hallmark projects in Louisiana's coastal restoration plans. We've already documented instances where restoration projects have been polluted by coal from existing export terminals," Grace Morris, senior organizer with Gulf Restoration Network, said. "The corps needs to respect the concerns of local governments and residents by holding a public hearing and studying this new information about RAM's impacts."

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