

Levee group slams ASCE investigation Probe into staff ethics has not been finished

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Levees.org, the local nonprofit flood protection watchdog group, blasted on Tuesday the American Society of Civil Engineers for failing to complete an investigation of alleged unethical behavior of its staff during the initial investigation of levee failures in New Orleans.

Levees.org founder Sandy Rosenthal further criticized delays in the completion of a review of ASCE's peer reviews of natural and man-made disasters, which the industry group commissioned in December after the filing of the ethics complaint.

"We think that these activities and these excessive delays are artificially manufactured to give the American Society of Civil Engineers time -- time to protect its own reputation, time to discredit those coming forward with ethics violations, time so that others coming forward with supporting information will be obstructed and intimidated, and probably worst of all, time so that the American public's attention will turn elsewhere," Rosenthal said.

ASCE spokeswoman Joan Buhrman said she could not say when the ethics investigation, being conducted by a committee of three former ASCE presidents, will be completed.

"The CPC is an independent group, and it sets its own timeline," she said. "It's a confidential process, and we can't really say anything else about it at this time."

Retired U.S. Rep. Sherwood Boehlert, R-N.Y., said his task force expects to deliver its report to the ASCE by the end

of the first week of September.

He said delays in its completion are because of schedule conflicts of its members.

The 42-page ethics complaint was filed by University of California-Berkeley engineering professor Raymond Seed, who claimed executives of ASCE and the corps systematically attempted to undermine an independent investigation led by Seed and sponsored by the National Science Foundation.

The Army Corps of Engineers has requested that the ASCE appoint an "external review panel" to advise the corps-sponsored Interagency Performance Evaluation Task Force, which was investigating the causes of flooding during Hurricane Katrina.

Since then, the review panel has continued to advise the corps on changes in policies and construction methods that stemmed from the IPET investigation. It also has published critiques of sections of the IPET's report as they have been completed.

In his letter, Seed was critical of what he called a cozy relationship between the corps and ASCE officials in attempting to control the results of the Katrina investigations.

He also criticized the corps' financing of ASCE's role in the investigation -- at a cost of about \$2 million -- as a conflict of interest.

Seed also charged the ASCE with shoddy investigative work in its probes of other disasters, including the collapse of the World Trade Center towers in New York after the

terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, and its investigation of the structural soundness of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City, the target of a 1995 bombing.

Seed said Tuesday he is not allowed to comment about the investigation of his ethics complaint under the organization's rules, but said he had been asked for further information, "and I provided it."

However, Seed said he also provided the committee "a very long list of witnesses, and none have been contacted as best I can determine."

"They've had nine months now, and it doesn't take nine months to do the right thing," he said.