

Congresswoman Jo Ann Emerson Has Expressed Her Strong Support for the Rapid Deployment Flood Wall to Her Colleagues in Congress

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ARE YOUR CONSTITUENTS STILL USING SANDBAGS TO FIGHT FLOODS?

Dear Colleague;

Those of us from Missouri know a few things about flooding. That is why I wanted to bring your attention to the *New York Times* article on the reverse of this page regarding an exciting new flood fighting technology that will revolutionize the way the federal government and your constituents fight floods.

Called the Rapid Deployment Flood Wall (RDFW), this new technology is a faster, less expensive, less labor intensive, and more cost effective alternative to sandbags. RDFW is produced through a partnership with Geocell Systems, Inc., Eastman Chemical Company, and Spartech Plastics, a Missouri-based company with a production facility in my district.

The RDFW is an easily expandable, stackable, modular wall made of tough, lightweight, environmentally friendly plastic that can be filled with sand or other locally available fill material for use as a flood protection barrier. It was developed through a cooperative research and development agreement with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and underwent successful testing at the Corps Research and Development Center in Vicksburg, Mississippi.

RDFW also has exciting possibilities as a protection barrier for our U.S. Armed Forces. It is currently being tested by the Marine Corps and will be used to protect select Naval bases on the East Coast.

Last year, the RDFW was demonstrated to elected leaders and emergency management officials in my district in Cape Girardeau, Missouri, as well as in other Corps Districts throughout the nation. Several Corps Districts have requested the RDFW to date. I would encourage you to learn more about this innovative technology. Al Arellanes, president of Geocell Systems, Inc., will be in Washington the week of March 3. If you have questions about RDFW, would like more information on setting up a demonstration in your congressional district, or would like to visit with Al while he is in Washington, please don't hesitate to contact my office.

Sincerely,



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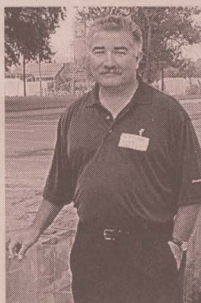
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AL ARELLANES

Building a Better Sandbag

PEOPLE have been filling sacks with sand to build walls against floodwaters for so long that no one is sure when the practice began. "We know they did it as far back as the Revolutionary War," said Les Miller, chief of the Army Corps of Engineers Readiness Branch in Portland, Ore.

There have been improvements along the way, most recently the development of polypropylene bags that are about half the cost of traditional burlap sacks and are less likely to attract rats. But when it comes to the backbreaking work of filling and placing them, sandbags are all pretty much the same.

No wonder Mr. Miller and other flood-control experts are so interested in the Rapid Deployment Flood Wall, an easily assembled plastic grid that can be filled with sand by earth-moving equipment. A work crew using the new system can put up a four-foot wall that is five and a half miles long in the same time it takes a similar number of sandbaggers to build one the length of a



Al Arellanes invented the Rapid Deployment Flood Wall, being filled above.

single football field.

The father of the new system is Al Arellanes, 53, an engineering contractor, who has set up a company called **Geocell Systems** in San Francisco to market it. Geocell's wall is based on an idea the Corps of Engineers originally developed as a foundation for roads and airfields in muddy and swampy conditions.

Mr. Arellanes began tinkering with the idea in the mid-1980's but had to put the project aside when he joined the Federal Emergency Management Agency in 1990. "I kind of dropped the ball for a while," he said. He did not return to it until 1997, when heavy flooding in the Central Valley of California rekindled his interest.

A turning point came in 2000, when he showed a prototype at a federal research center in Vicksburg, Miss. That attracted the interest of **Eastman Chemical**,

which provided a raw material that proved more effective than the original.

Now comes another hurdle. A footlong chunk of a four-foot-high Geocell wall costs about \$165, roughly 12 times more than sandbags that do the same work, though Geocell says its wall pays for itself in saved labor the first time it is used. Because it is easily cleaned and stored, savings mount with each use. But local governments, which must buy the system before the Corps of Engineers is authorized to stockpile a backup supply, have yet to invest.

Mr. Miller said the key to acceptance might be in finding ways for the walls to be used between floods — for stabilizing mudslide zones, for example, or protecting buildings that could be terrorist targets.

Mr. Arellanes agreed. "People don't budget for devastation," he said. **BARNABY J. FEDER**



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