

**Minutes of the National Sign Advisory Work Group
Headquarters, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
Thursday, 23 January 2003**

Attendees:

Mike Kidby, Navigation and Operations Branch, HQUSACE
David Johnson, Loyalhanna Lake, Pittsburgh District
Scott Strotman, Rock Island District
Greg Mollenkopf, North Atlantic Division
Dennis Wallace, Pomme de Terre Lake, Kansas City District
Henrik Strandskov, National Sign Program Manager, St. Paul District
Stephen Logan, Mobile District
Michael Owen, Fort Worth District
Tim Grundhoffer, National Sign Program MCX, St. Paul District
Thomas Sully, National Sign Program MCX, St. Paul District
Duane Johnson, Stanislaus River Parks, Sacramento District
Dean Osborn, Federal Prison Industries (UNICOR)
Karl Anderson, Office of Safety and Occupational Health, HQUSACE
Sam Testerman, Office of Safety and Occupational Health, HQUSACE
George Tabb, Natural Resources Management Branch, HQUSACE
Martin Cohen, Office of the Chief Counsel, HQUSACE
Judy Rice, Natural Resources Management Branch, HQUSACE
Debra Stokes, Natural Resources Management Branch, HQUSACE

Introductions, etc. George Tabb, recently named Chief of Natural Resources Management Branch, HQUSACE, welcomed meeting participants, noting that the Work Group was at a crossroads. We will be losing Debra Stokes as chair of the group, and we are welcoming new members. Both Mike Owen, representing Southwestern District, and Scott Strotman, representing Mississippi Valley Division, are attending their first Work Group meeting today. We are also hoping to replace, in the near future, our representatives from the Office of the Chief Counsel and the Office of Safety and Occupational Health.

Henrik Strandskov, National Sign Program Manager, explained that, unlike many Centers of Expertise, the National Sign Program MCX has a double proponenty at HQUSACE - Judy Rice, Natural Resources Management Branch, and Mike Kidby, Navigation and Operations Branch, are joint proponents of the MCX.

Debra Stokes explained that Karlissa Krombein is on extended medical leave and will not be returning to represent the Office of Chief Counsel on the Work Group. Martin Cohen will be representing Counsel at today's meeting. Representing the Office of Safety and Occupational Health were Sam Testerman, Acting Chief, and Karl Anderson.

National Sign Program MCX charter. Mr. Strandskov explained that the charter of sign program's Mandatory Center of Expertise (MCX) is out of date. For instance, it does not reflect the consolidation of the MCX with the MCX for waterway sign engineering, which took place a couple of years ago. Mr. Strandskov will prepare a draft of a new charter and coordinate it with the headquarters proponents and the other Work Group members.

UNICOR presentation. Dean Osborn, representing Federal Prison Industries (UNICOR), gave a presentation and responded to questions.

Mr. Osborn is a UNICOR Sign and Graphics Program Manager located in Fort Worth, Texas. Reporting on the management situation at the Lompoc penitentiary sign factory, Mr. Osborn said that factory manager Jim Halbeisen had been ill for several months. He is now recovering after a bone marrow transplant and is expected back to work soon. Mr. Osborn emphasized that Mr. Halbeisen operated the factory as a customer-driven organization. Cameron Johnson (805-735-6211) is the acting manager and is currently in charge of both the print shop and sign factory at Lompoc. (Note: Mr. Halbeisen had returned to work as of March 2003.)

Mr. Osborn pointed out that UNICOR has a center for price quotations in Littleton (Denver), Colorado, but it does only 10% of the quotes for the Corps. Jim Halbeisen likes to do his own quotes and load his own orders. This avoids any software problems they may have in their centralized systems. So Jim, to give better service, can “load” credit cards and do the quoting.

Mr. Osborn was asked about price lists and catalogs for Corps signs. Mr. Osborn said that he would bring back to his agency the importance of issuing new price lists. Tim Grundhoffer said that Corps research a few years ago showed that UNICOR prices were higher for waterway signs and wondered whether they have been getting orders for these. Mr. Osborn said that current prices might be less because they have been getting better prices from 3M on the diamond-grade material. Mr. Osborn and Tim Grundhoffer will exchange information to enable UNICOR to provide us current pricing on waterway signs.

The new procurement policies with regard to private vendors and UNICOR were discussed. Mr. Osborn provided background on the issue, beginning with the origins of the 2001 legislation. He noted that the law requires that UNICOR products available to the Department of Defense be comparable in price, quality, and delivery time to those available from private industry. Mr. Osborn felt that UNICOR signs were still competitive with those from private industry. (NOTE: DOD and Corps guidance on this issue can be found on the NRM Gateway website at <http://corpslakes.usace.army.mil/employees/sign/news.html>.) Work Group members pointed out that UNICOR continues to be the only source of signs outside the Corps that we can absolutely rely on to construct signs that completely meet our specifications. It was also noted that in some areas there appear to be no private sign shops that are even willing to bid on signs that meet our specifications.

A question was raised as to whether a district contracting officer is required to allow UNICOR to be one of the bidders after determining that a bidding process is appropriate. This came up after the group studied the excellent guidance that Scott Moore, Sign Program Manager at Walla Walla District, has distributed to his projects. That guidance says that UNICOR “can” be one of the potential vendors in a bidding situation. However, it appears from the language of the law that UNICOR must be allowed to be one of the bidders. (NOTE: In the words of the legislation, “In conducting such a competition, the Secretary shall consider a timely offer from Federal Prison Industries for award in accordance with the specifications and evaluation factors specified in the solicitation.”) The MCX will seek clarification of this issue and distribute the information.

Mr. Osborn said that the UNICOR waiver system is still in effect. UNICOR’s lead time is 50 days, so they will waive, for example, an order that has to be delivered in 30 days. He said that waivers are granted on a daily basis. Questions about the need for individual waivers on

routed signs and interpretive signs were raised. It was agreed that the Corps would seek a blanket waiver for these types of signs.

With regard to problems with UNICOR orders, there was a consensus that they are few and sometimes the result of misunderstandings on the part of Corps personnel placing the orders. There have been occasional reports of slow response time from the factory when problems are reported. Mr. Osborn mentioned that a problem with their phone message recorder was being corrected. He also said that callers having trouble with the regular Lompoc phone number, (805) 735-6211, could try (805) 737-3138. In addition to Jim Halbeisen, other contacts at the factory are the plant foremen, Mike York, Wally Henry, and Frank Hernandez.

Mr. Osborn said that UNICOR can do routed signs made of urethane. He will send us a brochure, and we will distribute the information.

Safety Manual and Safety Office representation on the Work Group. Sam Testerman and Karl Anderson of the Office of Safety and Occupational Health discussed the ongoing progress of the revision of the Corps *Safety and Health Requirements Manual*, EM 385-1-1. Of special concern to the Work Group are the discrepancies between the safety sign formats described in the draft safety manual and the formats required by the National Sign Standards Program. Mr. Testerman noted that the specifications in the proposed safety manual were based on American National Standards Institute (ANSI) and OSHA standards. It was agreed that a meeting will be set up to discuss this issue before the final version of the new safety manual is published.

Mr. Testerman and Mr. Anderson encouraged a close look at signage at construction sites.

Mr. Testerman announced that Karl Anderson would be the new Safety Office representative on the Work Group. The other Work Group members expressed their appreciation for this appointment; we look forward to the contributions that Mr. Anderson will make in this role.

Security issues and non-civil works signage. At some locations Army (military) security officials have directed that noncompliant signs be put up because of elevated threat statuses. This is an example of an occasional problem where Army security officials (and Corps staff) do not understand that the National Sign Standards Program supersedes regular Army sign policies at civil works facilities. At a previous Work Group meeting it had been decided to have the Office of Chief Counsel, HQUSACE, issue a memo clarifying this issue. The MCX had prepared a draft of the memo, but it has not been issued. The MCX will provide a copy of this memo to Mr. Cohen for review and, if appropriate, issuance.

Current safety sign waiver requests – Huntington District and San Francisco District.

Huntington District has requested a sign reading “Danger, Confined Space, Authorized Entry Only.” This would be used by dam intake tunnels where employees are discouraged from entering, except when absolutely necessary. During the earlier Work Group review of this request, it had been suggested that no decision be made without concurrence of the Office of Safety and Occupational Health. Safety Office review is a normal part of the sign waiver decision process, but last year’s retirement of the Safety Office representative on the Work Group prompted the decision to postpone the final discussion of the request until this meeting.

After some discussion, it was agreed that a sign with a “Restricted” heading should be suitable for the situation in Huntington District. (A new legend for a Restricted sign does not

need formal approval from the Work Group.) The MCX will suggest this alternative to Huntington District. (Note: Huntington District subsequently decided to use a Restricted sign.)

An important point raised by Mr. Anderson during the discussion was that the Safety Office discourages the signing of confined spaces where the danger is not great enough to require a permit for entry.

The other pending waiver request was from San Francisco District, which had requested a replacement Danger sign for the currently-used noncompliant signs at jetties. These mark a hazard unique to ocean jetties - rogue waves (that is, large waves that break on a jetty with no warning even when the water appears calm). The current signs read "DANGER, EXTREMELY HAZARDOUS WAVES, DO NOT WALK ON STRUCTURE, HAZARDOUS WAVE CONDITIONS EXIST EVEN ON CALM DAYS, WAVES CAN WASH OVER STRUCTURE AND SWEEP PEOPLE INTO THE OCEAN." The requested sign would read "Danger, Large Waves Can Wash Over Jetty at Any Time, Restricted Area – Keep Off."

Several issues were discussed regarding this request, including

- The need for consistency among the coastal districts in signing this kind of hazard.
- The need for an adequate public information program to complement signage for unusual hazards like this.
- The problem of enforcing a restriction when the hazard site is not staffed. (Generally, there is not an increased liability in this situation if the sign explains the reasons for the restriction.)
- The possibility that a Warning sign may be more appropriate, assuming that the hazard is not an imminent one.

It was decided that further coordination was needed between the Office of the Chief Counsel, HQUSACE, and San Francisco district Office of Counsel.

Symbol sign to prohibit archaeological digging and collecting. Omaha District's proposed symbol sign was discussed. A new version had been designed for Omaha by the Pittsburgh sign shop, but members of the Work Group felt that it was still too intricate and therefore not in the style of our other symbol signs. Group members who had worked with Omaha District on this stressed that the district felt strongly about the need for such a sign.

The district is especially concerned about increased visitation at federal facilities and property along the Missouri River during the Lewis and Clark commemoration. Many of these visits will be by tourists who may have limited English ability. In this context, some Work Group members felt that a good public information campaign (for example, brochures and ranger contacts) would be more useful than reliance on signage. (Note: The Corps has published three Lewis and Clark brochures that include messages about the possible exposure of artifacts and that collecting or digging of artifacts is illegal.)

After a great deal of discussion, the group decided (although not unanimously) to disapprove use of the proposed prohibition symbol sign. Pittsburgh District will try to create two acceptable alternative symbol signs for Omaha, one to prohibit digging and one to prohibit collecting.

Signs about dangerous animals. A Corps project requested signs warning of alligators. This has again raised the issue of whether to consider “inherent dangers” at a facility to be hazards worthy of special signage. It was the general sense of the Work Group that such potential hazards are best handled by public information programs that don’t necessarily include signs. Mr. Cohen made the distinction between hidden dangers that visitors couldn’t be aware of and inherent dangers (such as animals indigenous to a locale or obviously dangerous waterways) that visitors should expect. The hidden dangers should be signed, but not the inherent dangers. (Note: The sign program already provides two signs alerting visitors to the presence of alligators. Both are approved, nonstandard safety signs. One reads “Warning, Beware of Alligators,” and the other reads “Danger, Alligators Present, Do Not Feed, No Swimming or Wading.”)

State mandated language. A Corps project has been directed by the state environmental agency to put up a sign warning that water is possibly too polluted for swimming. The state sign is not in Corps format. Mr. Cohen noted that we are not required to post state signs on Corps property, but we might very well want to do it in the interest of comity. It was agreed that the best approach would be to write a letter to the state offering to put up an appropriate sign with their wording in our format. The letter should be reviewed by district counsel with oversight from the Office of Chief Counsel, HQUSACE. The tone of the letter should represent a positive response to the state request. If a good letter is created, the MCX can post it as a sample for other districts.

Water level sign. Sign BTR-02 reads “Caution, Lake Water Level Varies, Watch for Obstructions.” Scott Strotman has suggested that it would be useful to Corps projects to have available a legend that wasn’t restricted to lakes. The Work Group agreed. The MCX will issue guidance authorizing essentially the same sign, but without the word “Lake.” The guidance will note that existing signs using the old language continue to be in compliance with the sign standards program.

Safety signage at locks and dams. Tim Grundhoffer of the MCX gave an extensive presentation that explained the system he has designed for marking St. Paul District’s lock and dam restricted areas.

The system makes full use of the following language in the Corps sign manual: “The Corps waterway sign system is intended to complement the United States Coast Guard (USCG) Aids to Navigation and is not intended to be a substitute for the USCG system.” It is also in accord with the guidance issued by HQUSACE on 4 September 2001 that emphasized the use of nonverbal marking methods such as buoys.

By relying heavily on buoys and daymarks with the USCG hazard symbols, the St. Paul system lessens the need for verbal signs in the Corps format. (Daymarks are sign panels with warning or advisory symbols; they may include words.) Because St. Paul District’s symbol-only daymarks can be seen and understood from relatively great distances, they can be much smaller (and less expensive) than the corresponding verbal signs formatted according to Corps viewing distance specifications. Also, the St. Paul system relies on the excellent support that the Coast Guard itself provides in constructing and delivering the concrete bases and metal towers for daymarks and maintaining buoy lines and anchors. An important aspect of the system is that

Corps buoys would be added to the Coast Guard's light list, which is a formal document describing safety marking devices on the inland waterways.

It is hoped that other districts with large navigation projects can follow the principles used in the St. Paul system to create their own compliant marking systems at much less expense than if they used only verbal signs. To this end, the MCX will distribute guidance on the St. Paul system when the system design is complete.

Work Group members questioned whether this meant that we would be replacing Section 14 of the sign manual, which covers waterway signs. It was agreed that Section 14 would be modified to give districts more options with regard to safety-critical waterway signage, but it would not be abandoned.

The group discussed the need for a formal Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Coast Guard regarding the maintenance of our buoys. Such an MOU is being prepared by the Coast Guard in St. Louis for use with St. Paul. This could serve as a model for a national MOU. A Project Development Team should be developed to work on the MOU; it would consist of Mike Kidby, Tim Grundhoffer and others.

Symbol signs. Several proposed new symbols were discussed. The Work Group approved a symbol for roller blading. A symbol for personal watercraft was considered and approved, pending some slight modifications. A sled dog symbol was not approved because of its ambiguity and the rarity of sites where it might be used. A proposed new symbol for visitor centers was also turned down because it was not clear. Also discussed was the need for a better symbol to go with the legend "Pack It In, Pack It Out."

Corps signature on directional signs. Lieutenant Colonel Edward J. Kertis, Jr., District Engineer of Walla Walla District spoke briefly to the Work Group. He presented an enthusiastic argument for the use of the Corps logo/signature on approach roadway directional signs as a way of increasing public awareness of the many important contributions the Corps makes to local communities, regions, and the country as a whole.

Following Colonel Kertis's presentation, the Work Group discussed this issue, which has been covered in past meetings. Currently, we use the logo on only the standard identification sign. It does not appear on roadway directional signs because its use is considered to be a second message on the sign, and sign principles require that each sign contain only one message. Another issue is that many of our approach roadway directional signs are placed on right of ways controlled by local, county, or state highway agencies, and these agencies require signs in their own formats.

After considerable discussion, it was agreed, although not unanimously, to make a formal recommendation to the HQUSACE proponents that sign standards policy be changed to allow the Corps logo on approach roadway directional signs. This would be an option in cases where the appropriate highway agency permitted such a sign.

Corps SignPro, the new sign management software. The new, Windows-based version of the sign management software is currently being developed by Peter Reedijk of Sea Reach, Ltd. Mr. Reedijk developed the original DOS-based version of the software. The new software will be located on a server and accessed via the Internet.

Henrik Strandskov demonstrated a nonfunctional version of the new software for the Work Group so that the group could evaluate the look and feel of the software. The group expressed

general approval of the software, and a subgroup was established to recommend initial revisions and modifications. The MCX will assemble their comments and forward them to the software vendor.

Accessibility signage. Two issues were discussed relating to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), the Uniform Federal Accessibility Standard (UFAS), and the Americans with Disabilities Act Accessibility Guidelines (ADAAG).

The first of the issues is that, according to the ADAAG, signs for restrooms should have raised (embossed) symbols and braille letters. The second issue, which has been discussed before, is the fact that blue is used almost everywhere for signs with the Universal Symbol of Accessibility (the stylized person in a wheelchair).

It was agreed that the sign manual should be revised to include the embossed restroom signs and the color blue for signs with the accessibility symbol. The MCX will make these changes in the electronic version of the manual before it is published.

Signpost materials. Dave Johnson has alerted the Work Group to the fact that lumber treated with chromated copper arsenate (CCA) is being phased out for residential construction because it contains arsenic. We should therefore no longer recommend it for signposts. There are new treatments for lumber that are shorter-lived, but still acceptable for our purposes. The MCX will issue guidance on this to the district sign program managers.

The use of plastic for signposts was also discussed. These posts are weaker than wood, and most manufacturers do not recommend ground or concrete contact (because of mold problems.) However, manufacturing processes are better now, and plastic may be an acceptable wood alternative in some cases. The MCX will research and provide guidance on the NRM Gateway website.

Corps signs in historic districts. A Corps district has inquired about changing the format of Corps signs to match the signs in a city-designated historic district. (The Corps project site is located within the historic district.) The Work Group agreed that abandoning Corps sign standards in this case was not appropriate. A primary reason for the decision was that it would “open the door” for eroding the standards in other situations.

Dennis Wallace new chair of the Work Group. Because of her duties in Natural Resources Management Branch, HQUSACE, Debra Stokes is no longer able to serve as chair of the Sign Advisory Work Group. Dennis Wallace was nominated as the new chair and agreed to serve. Members of the group thanked Stokes for her service as chair and for her long and productive involvement with the sign program.

Next meeting. The next meeting of the Work Group was tentatively set for the second week in June 2003.