

Rensselaer engineers to inspect levees

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Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute scientists are going to New Orleans as part of an expert team investigating levee failures caused by Hurricane Katrina.

The researchers, funded by a special exploratory grant from the National Science Foundation, plan to take lessons from the disaster and apply them to the design of levee systems across the nation.

Tom Zimmie, professor and acting chairman of civil and environmental engineering at Rensselaer, was recruited for the project by Ray Seed, professor of civil engineering at the University of California-Berkeley.

Seed organized a group of nationally recognized experts to collaborate with the Army Corps of Engineers and the American Society of Civil Engineers.

"Civil engineers have been warning of the possibility that a hurricane might breach the levees in New Orleans for years, with the potential for catastrophic flooding," Zimmie said. "There are hundreds of miles of similar levees across the United States, and we need a better understanding of how to design these systems to protect people from future disasters."

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