



**Florida Department of Transportation-D-6  
Port of Miami Tunnel Study**

**News Clip**

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Subject: **Test blast for port project goes well**

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## **Test blast for port project goes well**

***A large test blast at the Port of Miami-Dade resulted in only a few small dead fish, as a controversial dredging project opposed by anglers and environmentalists got off to an encouraging start.***

By **CURTIS MORGAN**

Dredging crews on Thursday triggered the most powerful underwater explosion they'll set off in Port of Miami-Dade waters.

Project manager Roy Woods said he fielded a call from someone downtown "concerned there might be an earthquake." So at least one sensitive person apparently felt it.

Otherwise, the explosion caused few ripples and killed only a handful of fish -- a big test of what has been billed as a new kind of environmentally friendly, or at least friendlier, blasting.

Explosives haven't been used in large dredging projects in Florida for decades, in part, because the methods of the past killed masses of marine life.

The blast -- part of a testing phase for a \$35 million project to deepen Fisherman's Channel and widen a ship-turning basin on the south side of the port -- was four times more powerful than an initial one on Saturday. The latest blast produced a thud barely audible just outside a 1,500-foot safety zone, a flash of white froth and slightly more vibrations on shore.

But it killed even fewer fish. Two volunteer boats working with a state biologist collected eight fish, the largest a 12.5-inch hogfish. On Saturday, 15 small fish floated up.

## **FOUR-MONTH PROJECT**

While those results are encouraging, biologists and contractors both caution fish kills could vary widely during what is expected to be a four-month project of twice-daily blasts once the 12-day test period ends next week.

So far, blasts have been confined to the middle of Fisherman's Channel, away from the grass flats and rocky seawalls that support more and larger fish. It's also impossible to assess how many injured fish swim away to die or are carried off in currents.

State wildlife managers and many recreational anglers are particularly worried about the impact on snook, a game fish that spawns in port waters around mid-August.

"They basically will have to be in the wrong place at the wrong time," said Lisa Ockelmann-Lobello, a biologist with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission.

Woods, project manager for Illinois-based Great Lakes Dredge & Dock, the country's largest dredging contractor, echoed that. While helicopters and boats watch out for federally protected dolphin, manatee and sea turtles, "we have no way of knowing what to expect with the fish. Each location is different," he said.

But the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, contractors and port managers say better blasting methods sharply reduce underwater shock waves that kill fish.

## **`SCARE CHARGES'**

About 4,000 pounds of explosives were used Thursday, but instead of blowing it all at once, a computerized triggering system set off small amounts sequenced milliseconds apart. The largest individual blast was only about 296 pounds, roughly twice what contractors expect to use during the project. To further tamp down vibrations, drilling crews also cap each hole, channeling more energy into the rock.

Crews also set off small "scare charges" intended to drive fish off before the blast.

The test blasts are intended to determine the most efficient way to crack the rock and to gauge impact on structures at the port, Fisher Island and downtown Miami. Woods said Thursday's big blast was well under county vibration standards. "It's just different techniques," Woods said.

``We didn't have computers before, but now we do."`