



Florida Department of Transportation-D-6 News Clip
Port of Miami Tunnel Study

From: *Miami Herald*, Sunday, June 26, 2005
Subject: **Underwater blasting test kills just a few small fish**

Underwater blasting test kills just a few small fish

A dredging project's first test blast showed surprisingly few effects to underwater wildlife, but some experts remain concerned.

By *CURTIS MORGAN*

The first test of underwater blasting at the Port of Miami-Dade got off to a promising start Saturday, meaning a quiet one.

The explosion couldn't be felt or even heard aboard a boat just outside a 1,500-foot safety zone, and only 15 fish -- none more 9 ½ inches long -- were found floating afterward.

More important: No dead dolphins, turtles, manatees or snook.

"Needless to say, I breathed a small sigh of relief," said Terri Jordan, a biologist with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

Jordan and other federal officials view the 4-month-long project to deepen a channel and turning basin at the port as an important test of whether new blasting techniques can be an environmentally sound dredging alternative in Florida.

State wildlife managers said they were pleased by the lack of carnage but pointed out that this blast was only the first -- and smallest -- in a series of tests lasting 12 days. The largest, scheduled next week, will be four times stronger.

This blast also was in the middle of Fisherman's Channel, away from rocky sides and seawalls that shelter larger fish such as grouper and snook.

"The closer they get to structure and the seawall by the port, the more I think we're going to see other things come up," said Lisa Ockelmann-Lobello, a biologist for the Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission, which has pushed the port and Army corps for more fish monitoring.

The project has become controversial with environmentalists and anglers.

But port managers say the \$35 million project, which will deepen a section of Fisherman's Channel and a ship-turning basin on the port's south side from 34 feet to 42, will help it accommodate and attract larger freighters.

The port, the Army corps and its contractor, Illinois-based Great Lakes Dredge & Dock Co., the country's biggest dredging contractor, also say new timing and drilling techniques will sharply reduce underwater shock waves that have killed scores of fish and marine mammals in the past.

To further reduce the threat to dolphins, manatees and turtles, they also employed spotters in boats and a helicopter. On Saturday, the chopper saw two manatees and one sea turtle. But the manatees were outside a 2,400-foot safety zone around the blast site, and the sea turtle passed through the zone 30 minutes before the blast, which occurred just after 5:30 p.m.

From the surface, the blast looked powerful.

Leif Hvide, one of two boaters who volunteered to help the FWC collect carcasses, said he and his friend, Carlos Carbonell, immediately turned to each other and said, ``*Hunt for Red October*."

But unlike the explosions in the movie, this one was a large, low eruption of water that was drowned out by the sound of wind and nearby boats.

The toll on fish, however, was surprisingly small -- one hogfish, one lane snapper, one porkfish, one scrawled cowfish, four white grunt and seven lookdown. All small.

But Lisa Gregg, an FWC management analyst, said the state used only two volunteer boats for the first small test and, with a strong current ripping through the channel, it's hard to say how many others might have been lost.