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Second Step Take In Floodway Operation

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Breaking News

An SMT News Report

SIKESTON, Mo. - The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers will take the second step in the activation of the Birds Point New Madrid Floodway this Sunday afternoon.

Maj. Gen. Michael Walsh, President of the Mississippi River Commission, has directed Col. Vernie Reichling, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Memphis District Commander, and field crews to be prepared to move to the next step in the Birds Point New Madrid Floodway operational plan at 3 p.m. today.

The second step in the operational plans involves repositioning the barges at Birds Point. These barges will contain the munitions that will be used to blast a breach in the floodway levee, thus activating the Birds Point floodway plan for only the second time since the 1937 flood.

At 1 p.m. Sunday the river gauge at Cairo, Ill., measured 59.89 feet, reaching an historic level.

Widespread storms Saturday night contributed to a swift rise in the river level. At Cape Girardeau, 1.5 inches of rain was measured from storms Saturday night.

The Ohio River at Cairo rose 0.7 feet in the 24 hours before the early Sunday afternoon reading of the guage.

"The Project Flood is upon us," Maj. Gen. Michael Walsh, President of the Mississippi River Commission said today. "This is the flood that engineers envisioned following the 1927 flood. It is testing the system like never before."

Walsh said Public Safety is the Corps' highest priority and that all resources are being used to battle the effects of this flooding. Hundreds of Corps' personnel from around the nation as well as the Engineering Research Development Center, in Vicksburg, Miss., are working around the clock, monitoring the situation.

He added that he and his advisors are closely monitoring the situation but that no decision has been made at this time whether or not to operate the floodway. However, should flood pressures continue to increase it may be necessary to move to the next step in the Floodway Operations Plan.

Activating the floodway is multi-step process, with step one taken Saturday in moving the barges to Birds Point, and step two Sunday in repositing the.

The other steps in floodway operation include loading the pipes in the levee with slurry (explosives), and finally activating the floodway.

On Saturday, Welsh held a briefing with news media in Sikeston, and U.S. Rep. Jo Ann Emerson attended that briefing.

Walsh was scheduled to conduct a briefing at the Southeast Missouri Regional Port Authority in Scott city, with U.S. Senator Roy Blunt and Emerson both in attendance. That briefing was cancelled due to weather conditions.

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