U.S. Department of Homeland Security
United States Coast Guard

NEWS RELEASE

U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS **BUILDING STRONG®**

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UPDATE – Rock removal work underway on Middle Mississippi

ST. LOUIS – The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers rock removal work is underway on the Mississippi River near Thebes, Ill.

Work began Saturday, Dec. 15, upstream of the Thebes railroad bridge. Low water on the river has allowed rock removal to be accomplished using excavating equipment. The progress of the excavation reduces the need for marine blasting, although that remains one of the options for permanently improving the channel for low water periods.

The U.S. Coast Guard is coordinating notices to mariners, and river closures are in effect for 16 hours on working days between 6 a.m. and 10 p.m. each day during the rock removal, with traffic allowed to pass for eight hours.

The work will remove around 890 cubic yards of limestone from the water-starved river to reduce the risk for vessels in the channel during low water. The rocks are part of a large formation that impedes the navigation channel during low water. More rock removal is planned for later dates, but the work beginning Saturday will address areas that will have the most immediate impact on the navigation.

Removing the rock formations are one of many operations the Corps and U.S. Coast Guard are undertaking along the narrowing river to maintain a 9-foot deep channel for river navigation. Dredging has been ongoing since early July to preserve the channel, as well as continued surveys, channel patrols to keep commerce safely moving on the Middle Mississippi.

The Corps is in constant communication and coordination with the Coast Guard and the river industry as the drought has reduced water levels throughout the Mississippi River Basin to historic lows.

The Corps of Engineers is working with the Fish and Wildlife Service and the Missouri Department of Conservation to avoid and minimize impacts to the environment. The focus by both the Corps and the Coast Guard, Hall said, is safety during the operation. The Coast Guard has established a safety zone for the affected sections of the river. The safety zone will prohibit access to the river and affected areas along the banks on both sides of the blasting sites. Safe public access to the work area is limited. Coast Guard, Corps and local safety officials remind anyone planning to be in the area to be aware of posted signage and respect private property.

Coast Guard, Corps and local safety officials remind anyone planning to be in the area to be aware of posted signage and respect private property. Be aware that places newly revealed by low water are unstable. Signage and other warning notices may not be immediately visible since many were placed when the river was at a higher stage. Approaching the water at any time should include a life vest. When in doubt, don't go out.

For more information, visit www.mvs.usace.army.mil/lowwater.

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