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**United States
Coast Guard**



NEWS RELEASE

U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS

BUILDING STRONG®

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ST. LOUIS – A stretch of the Mississippi River that has been closed during daylight hours will be open full-time next week as work crews removing rock break for the holiday.

The U.S. Coast Guard has been directing barge traffic in the area to allow the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to remove rocks that pose a risk to navigation near Thebes, Ill. The Coast Guard has a mobile command post in nearby Cape Girardeau, Mo., directing river traffic. 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 Coast Guard and Corps team on-site has helped ensure we can safely keep commerce moving on the river while accomplishing this critical work to provide a more reliable channel on the Middle Mississippi,” said Capt. Byron Black, Coast Guard Sector Upper Mississippi River.

Recent rains and water releases from the Corps’ Carlyle Lake have improved the forecast for the Middle Mississippi River, with river levels rising over the next several days. According to the latest National Weather Service worst case, “no rain” forecasts, river levels won’t reach -5 feet on the St. Louis gage until mid-January. At that point, the rock formations at Thebes impede the 9-foot-deep navigation channel.

“The worst case scenario is improbable,” said Mississippi Valley Division Commander, Maj. Gen. John Peabody, “We use a ‘worst case’ scenario as a planning tool to prepare and execute actions to support navigation, but the reality is weather is a dynamic variable, so predictions that navigation would halt have not come to pass.”

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

“Our contractors are making great progress using heavy excavators to clear much of the rock pinnacles,” said Col. Chris Hall, commander of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers St. Louis District. “We’re cautiously optimistic that with the success we’ve had so far and the improved outlook for river levels that we’ll be able to stay ahead of the river.”

Removing the rock formations is one of many operations the Corps is 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.

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