



# NEWS RELEASE

**U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS**

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## **U.S. Army Corps of Engineers taking measures against high water at Wood River Levee adjacent to Melvin Price Locks and Dam**

**St. Louis – Saturday, March 27** – The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, St. Louis District announced today, interim steps to counter high Mississippi River impacts on the Wood River Levee in the immediate vicinity of the Melvin Price Locks and Dam, south of Alton, IL. The steps are deemed necessary to reduce risks to public safety for the area protected by the levee.

The interim plan is described as a series of proactive measures that were originally announced to local leaders last fall. Early phases, including installing additional monitoring equipment and more frequent visits by engineers have already been initiated. The next precautionary step, increased ponding levels in the wetland area, is underway now.

The step being implemented now is air lifting to increase groundwater flow from in place relief wells. This will reduce uplift water pressures on the levee foundation.

Air compressors will be brought in under contract, to inject compressed air into existing relief wells to relieve ground water pressure. If pressures between the river and land on the east side of the levees are not reduced in this manner, engineers would expect to see greater movement of soil materials – sand boiling - from below ground. Left unchecked, this could damage the foundation of the levee, weakening it.

If additional ponding becomes necessary, engineers are prepared to add rock dikes in the wetland area to permit raising ponding levels without impacting the Alton combined sewer system.

To implement the plans, the St. Louis District has had to declare an emergency. This procedure, which was started last night, does not indicate a predicted eminent failure of the levee at the location, but rather is a necessary step to start the flow of funding to pay for the next steps to best ensure public safety. Without this declaration it would be illegal for the St. Louis District to contract for necessary added services.

The emergency declaration does not apply to any other locations in the District, nor does it imply that high levels of flooding are expected at this time elsewhere in the St. Louis District.

Executing the air lifting is called for in the plan based on current and near term local and upstream weather predictions and their potential impacts on Mississippi River flows and elevations. It is called for if the Mississippi River elevation is predicted to reach 421 feet, which the National Weather Service has indicated could happen by the end of this weekend as well as into the somewhat longer range.

This situation and plan has previously been discussed with Wood River and Drainage District, and Madison County officials. It was also the subject of a Corps of Engineers vertical team, meeting Dec. 10, 2009.

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## Wood River Levee 2-2-2

That meeting included St. Louis District, Mississippi Valley Division and Corps of Engineers Headquarters representatives. At the meeting, the engineers reported uncontrolled water underseepage in the ponding area east of Highway 143, adjacent to the Melvin Price Locks and Dam. They told the assembled experts that they had observed unexpected small sand boils, which were not predicted to occur at the normal 419 foot Mississippi River elevation in the pool above the Mel Price Locks and Dam.

With construction of the new Melvin Price Locks and Dam about two miles downstream from the old Locks 26 at Alton, elevation in the Mississippi River there was raised about 12 feet in 1989.

An interim plan was accepted as a key measure to develop a permanent way to counter high waters. It is a progressive series of steps to lower risks of predicted river rises.

While river elevations in the near term are predicted by the National Weather Service to hover around the 421 foot elevation, perhaps dropping below that figure if weather is favorable, that cannot be predicted with absolute certainty. For that reason, previously determined measures are being implemented at this time.

Long range permanent fixes to the soil movement issues at the location are still being examined to ensure the best scientific-engineering measures are implemented. Possible solutions include constructing a sand berm in the adjacent ponding area or installing a cement-bentonite cut off wall along approximately 7,000 feet of the levee, from the crown of the levee to bedrock, some 175 feet below. While costs will be a factor in the final decision, the determining factor in the choice will be public safety.

Local citizens may observe air lifting operations as they pass by on Highway 143. But they are encouraged not to stop to watch, as this may cause potential traffic hazards. Local emergency response authorities will be kept informed throughout operations and media advisories will be issued as necessary.

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**Note to Editors:** At this time (Saturday, 27 March), there is nothing visible occurring at the site adjacent to the Melvin Price Locks and Dam. We will inform you when equipment starts to be put in place and/or operation so you may obtain images and footage if you wish. We will also try to arrange for an engineer who is close to this project to be available early in the story, perhaps on site. But their focus is properly on the task at hand, which may preclude their immediate participation. Attached images are available at higher resolution if requested.

In the meantime, you may contact St. Louis District Public Affairs Chief Alan Dooley. He can be reached at the following points of contact at various times and will respond as quickly as he can.

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