



International Boundary and Water Commission United States Section

For immediate release
12:15 p.m. CDT, June 29, 2010

PREPARATIONS UNDERWAY FOR TROPICAL STORM ALEX

The United States Section of the International Boundary and Water Commission (USIBWC) has begun preparations for potential flood operations in the Lower Rio Grande Valley in Texas associated with Tropical Storm Alex. The National Weather Service (NWS) has issued a hurricane warning for portions of the Texas coast in the Rio Grande basin. The USIBWC operates the Lower Rio Grande Flood Control Project, which consists of a series of flood control levees, dams, and floodways in Hidalgo, Cameron, and Willacy Counties.

In accordance with USIBWC operating guidelines, whenever a tropical depression, storm, or hurricane is within 100 miles of the Rio Grande watershed, or when forecast precipitation could produce a major flood, USIBWC staff go on “stand-by alert” status to initiate preparations such as testing of emergency generators, communications systems, and hydrographic equipment; checking on the availability of additional staff and flood supplies, such as sandbags and sand, and checking on the availability of contractors’ equipment and personnel. Coordination is also initiated with federal, state, and local agencies.

The USIBWC has already begun to move equipment and personnel from its other offices to supplement the Lower Rio Grande Flood Control Project Office in Mercedes, Texas. The deployment includes heavy equipment operators, a front end loader, a sandbag machine, and personnel to measure flow volume in the river and floodways.

Contractors currently constructing levee improvements for the USIBWC have already been notified to execute their flood protection plans, which require them to ensure that any levee segments

under construction be restored to their pre-construction state in advance of a flood. This work will be completed on June 29.

Should the Rio Grande experience flood conditions, USIBWC staff will move into Flood Fight Operations. During this phase of response, crews work 24 hours per day to patrol flood control levees to identify and respond to any problems that could arise such as erosion along the levees, freeboard encroachment, or seepage on the land side of the levees. Sand bagging operations will be established if needed. Crews also take more frequent flow measurements to track and document the flood. During Hurricane Dolly in 2008, flood conditions were not experienced in the USIBWC's Lower Rio Grande Flood Control Project although flooding occurred due to local drainage problems on the land side of the USIBWC levees.

As part of its flood operations, the USIBWC also exchanges information with the Mexican Section of the Commission regarding flood conditions. The USIBWC provides data about Mexico's Rio Grande tributaries to the NWS, which uses this and U.S. data to formulate flood forecasts. If necessary, the two Sections of the Commission jointly operate the Retamal and Anzalduas Diversion Dams according to established criteria to ensure the equitable diversion of Rio Grande floodwaters into each country's floodway or to make flood releases from Amistad and Falcon International Storage Reservoirs located upstream on the Rio Grande. In May, the U.S. and Mexican Sections of the Commission conducted their annual flood workshop in preparation for the hurricane season.

Residents in the affected region should monitor National Weather Service warnings and forecasts for information about Tropical Storm Alex and any flood watches, warnings, and advisories that could be issued for the Lower Rio Grande Valley.

Current information about Rio Grande flow as well as storage and release data from U.S. and Mexican reservoirs in the Rio Grande basin is available on the USIBWC web page at:

http://www.ibwc.gov/Water_Data/Reports/RG_Flow_data.html

For more information:

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