

For immediate release  
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## USIBWC BREAKS GROUND ON RIO GRANDE LEVEE IMPROVEMENTS IN EL PASO, TEXAS

The United States Section of the International Boundary and Water Commission (USIBWC) held a groundbreaking ceremony today for Rio Grande levee improvements in El Paso, Texas. When completed later this summer, the project will provide adequate protection from the 100-year flood for adjacent properties in the United States.

According to USIBWC studies, portions of the Rio Grande flood control levee are not high enough to meet Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) requirements. FEMA requires that levees be able to contain the 100-year flood with three feet of freeboard (the distance between the water surface elevation and the top of the levee). To meet this requirement, the USIBWC is raising the levee along a 7.4-mile segment from the end of the concrete-lined Chamizal Channel (upstream of Ascarate Park ) to just downstream from the Ysleta-Zaragoza Bridge. The levee is being raised by inches in some areas up to a maximum of three feet.

FEMA is currently developing Flood Insurance Rate Maps for El Paso County to identify properties at risk of flooding. Where levees are inadequate, property owners may be required to purchase flood insurance. Once the levee-raising project is completed, property owners in adjacent areas are expected to be exempt from the flood insurance requirement.

“I am pleased that we were able to begin this project prior to the flood season,” said USIBWC Commissioner Carlos Marin. “By getting this work done now, we can save many El Pasoans the expense of purchasing flood insurance.”

The cost of the levee project is \$1 million. Work is expected to be completed in 3-4 months. The Commission will also initiate sediment removal activities during the current fiscal year in the concrete-lined Chamizal Channel through central El Paso-Ciudad Juarez. Although El Paso experienced localized flooding during storms in 2006, Rio Grande levees in the United States were not overtopped.

The USIBWC has also developed plans for levee work in other portions of El Paso County and Doña Ana County, New Mexico. This work will be accomplished subject to the availability of federal appropriations.

For the international reach of the river, the USIBWC is working with the Mexican Section of the Commission to draft an agreement to determine additional work necessary to restore the Rio Grande flood control project to its full conveyance capacity and which works can be carried out in the medium and long term. These activities are aimed at offering greater protection for those who live on both sides of the border in the area of El Paso and Ciudad Juarez.

For more information:

Sally Spener  
915-832-4175  
sallyspener@ibwc.state.gov