

Pottawattamie Emergency Management



Jeff Theulen, Emergency Management Director for Pottawattamie County, spoke about flooding in Pottawattamie County on July 16. He grew up in Shelby County and graduated from Harlan in 1976. Jeff spent 28 years as a policeman before beginning his current job. He is also Assistant Chief of the Treynor Fire Department and spent 33 years in the military reserve.

Jeff said that a Colorado Incident Management Team just came to town yesterday. They will help Pottawattamie County avoid a public works disaster following the flooding in the county. All storm sewers in Council Bluffs are shut off, requiring storm water to be pumped out. A rain over one or two inches will totally swamp the system. The main emphasis now is damage control.

Every county in Iowa has an Emergency Management Director. They work for a state commission that meets about twice each year. They have identified the ten highest priority types of emergencies in each county and learn how to address those possible problems.

Jeff said that Pottawattamie County will probably have losses of \$100 million. Road repair is currently estimated at \$40 million. Repair of the levies will be performed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and

could cost another \$100-150 million.

Jeff said that levies are not dams. They are designed to control water for 7-10 days. They are usually built of dirt with clay on top, but older ones are only dirt. New ones often have concrete down the middle. The Iowa National Guard patrols the levies and find about 150 small holes each day, mainly from rodents and small animals.

The current flooding is mainly a result of 10-20 inches of rain that fell over much of Montana on May 14-18. On May 23, Jeff received the first call that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers would double the release of water from Gavins Point Dam. The current release rate is 160,000 cubic feet per second, which is double the highest release ever before, which was 78,000. The release will begin to slow to 150,000 cubic feet per second on August 5, but the water levels are not expected to decrease because of the water outside of the river that needs to move downstream. There is a significant concern that there will not be time to fix the levies by Spring.

So far there have been 256 houses destroyed in Pottawattamie County. There are 35,000 people living in flood plains in Council Bluffs. Shelters have been set up with a capacity of 3,000, but most people in the area go to live with relatives and friends instead of shelters.

A major concern coming soon is what to do when Council Bluffs schools open on 17 August. Some schools in the district are within throwing distance of levies.