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Rain, breaches multiply worries

By Emily Nohr
WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER



JAMES R. BURNETT/THE WORLD-HERALD

Rain swamped the area around Hot Shops, north of TD Ameritrade Park, Saturday morning.

The rains that soaked the Omaha area on Saturday heightened concerns about flooding in the region.

Parts of eastern Nebraska had up to 2.5 inches of rain, while areas of southwest Iowa received more than an inch, said Rick Chermok of the National Weather Service.

The rains fell in a six-hour period and tested Omaha's flood control efforts along the riverfront. Storm drains overflowed and some north downtown businesses were flooded.

Authorities in Harrison County, Iowa, were dealing with a levee breach and rising Missouri River floodwaters.

Emergency officials urged people to evacuate Saturday following the breach one mile south of mile marker 2 on U.S. Highway 30 near Missouri Valley.

Water threatened to overtop Highway 30, which connects Missouri Valley with Blair, Neb.

The situation was deteriorating Saturday night and the highway could close with no advance notice, the Iowa Department of Transportation said. Nebraska officials said they would close the Nebraska side of Highway 30 if that happens.

Floodwaters were expanding into farmland and the De Soto National Wildlife Refuge near Missouri Valley, said Larry Oliver, Harrison County emergency director.

An estimated 18 residences are within the evacuation warning. Oliver said some homes were vacant, making it difficult to determine how many people were affected.

Fremont County, Iowa, was monitoring flooding along the Nishnabotna River.

The river flows past the east side of Hamburg, already dealing with the threat of Missouri River flooding.

"Any rain that happens north of us comes down the Missouri or the Nishnabotna, and that will all impact us down here," said Mike Crecelius, the county's emergency management director. "It's just a matter of waiting and seeing what it actually does when it gets here."

In Omaha, some of the heaviest rain fell in a narrow path between Eppley Airfield and Offutt Air Force Base. Parts of midtown Omaha and Millard also were drenched.

About a foot of water pooled on the east side of the Qwest Center Omaha, and areas around the levee were chest-deep in water, said Marty Grate, an Omaha public works official.

Lot D next to TD Ameritrade Park flooded, as did several streets north of the ballpark.

The ballpark itself weathered the storm well, with no standing water. The dugouts remained dry, too. Eppley Airfield had some standing water but not enough to affect operations, airport officials said.

At least a foot of water surrounded the Hot Shops Art Center at 13th and Nicholas Streets, said the building's managing partner, Tim Barry. It was the second time this month that the Hot Shops area saw heavy street flooding.

Barry said there was also about a foot of water in the building's boiler room. Pumps were installed to dry out the bottom floor.

"We hope and pray we don't get a three-inch rain in the next couple days," he said.

The standing water was gone by 1 p.m. Saturday. Hot Shops is closed on weekends, but Barry was unsure if the art center would open Monday.

Grate, the public works official, said the Burt-Izard pumping station was pumping about 110,000 gallons of storm and sewer water per minute back into the Missouri River on Saturday afternoon. The pumps were not operating at full capacity.

Officials expected the pumps to eliminate the standing water near the ballpark by Sunday. The College World Series resumes Monday night.

An additional nine pumps will be installed this week on the west side of Riverfront Drive.

Mayor Jim Suttle said that so far the city has spent about \$3.3 million on flood control since the Missouri River threat developed in late May.

"We're battling Murphy's Law. The way to win is to stay ahead of Murphy," Suttle said.

More rain was possible Sunday night across the region, said the National Weather Service's Chermok.

The system will move from Omaha to Shenandoah, Iowa, and could bring up to 1 inch of rain in spots. The rain could linger into Monday, he said.

World-Herald staff writer Sam Womack contributed to this report.

Contact the writer:

402-444-1117, emily.nohr@owh.com

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