



Omaha World-Herald 59°
Omaha.com

Search

Narrow search to » All | News | Sports | Money | Living | Go | More » | Archive

Latest News Popular

- New emails in pipeline controversy
- Man arrested in Lincoln stabbing
- Fremont schools ban rosaries
- Panel to examine simulcasting
- Wayne State inauguration set
- NTK (Need to Know)
- Car used to break into business
- Plan for North O worked elsewhere
- Man struck by bus in Omaha
- Districts scrambling on budgets
- Court to revisit ex-Husker's case
- Buffett still bullish on Obama
- Carnival for the dogs
- Abortion protested in Life Chain
- A lost summer on the Missouri

CALENDAR

Register an Event

Mon 03	Tue 04	Wed 05	Thu 06	Fri 07	Sat 08	Sun 09
--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------

Today | Activities | Art | Music | Seasonal

Autos Homes Rentals Jobs Classifieds Legals Obits Find a Business Ads

Boocoo

HOME NEWS SPORTS MONEY LIVING ENTERTAINMENT LIVE WELL NEBRASKA

Featured: OWHstore Premium Content Sex & Relationships Prep Zone FYI Rodeo



A plane comes in for a landing Tuesday over a flooded field north of the levee that protects Eppley Airfield. The structures are approach lights.

[More Photos \(2\)](#)

MATT MILLER/THE WORLD-HERALD

Published Wednesday June 8, 2011

Airport bolsters flood defenses

By [Juan Perez Jr.](#)
WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

« [Metro/Region](#)

News Alerts Like Confirm Share

The Omaha Airport Authority took emergency action Tuesday to shore up the defenses of the region's largest commercial airport against floodwaters that threaten much of the area.

Although Eppley Airfield operations haven't been disrupted by the swollen Missouri River, officials believe that additional measures must be taken to protect 2,700 acres of airport infrastructure worth hundreds of millions of dollars.

High water levels are expected to persist in the area for weeks.

"This airport is extremely important to the economy, not just of the city but the state," said Steve Coufal, the Airport Authority's executive director.

"It must be protected at all costs."

Eppley serves more than 4.2 million passengers a year on about 90 daily flights. The airport serves much of Nebraska, the western half of Iowa and southern South Dakota.

That calculus is at the core of the airport's current mission — plan for the worst, even though it might not come.

There are three primary areas of focus:

>>The integrity of a seven-mile stretch of earthen levee that surrounds Eppley runways.

>>Airport pumping systems responsible for bailing out rainwater and underground water that bubbles to the surface.

>>Protecting infrastructure if additional rain contributes to flooding.

Related News

- Platte, too, may pack a punch
- Bluffs water fine to drink
- Heineman touring flood areas
- The latest on flooding
- Mills County braces for water
- Missouri River information, resources

Related Links

- Photo showcase: Tuesday flood pictures
- Accuweather forecast

Today's ePaper



Omaha World-Herald

- [Subscriber Services](#)

ePaper online

- [Subscriber log-in](#)
- [Single-Copy log-in](#)
- [Buy today's ePaper](#)

print-Edition

- [Subscribe for delivery](#)
- [Single copy locations](#)

ADVERTISEMENT

Officials with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers have assured the Omaha Airport Authority that the levee will stand up to mounting pressure. Airport workers check Eppley's portion of the levee every two hours for any sign of deterioration.

The bigger concern for the airport's safety comes from underground.

As large amounts of river water press against the federally constructed levee, the water will naturally force itself anywhere possible to relieve the pressure. That means water will seep into the surrounding soil, thereby elevating underground water levels below the airport property.

If airport officials did nothing, computer models show, groundwater levels would rise to a point where water would bubble up and envelop the runways and terminals — along with the area adjacent to the river.

But authorities said they're not standing idle.

"If we do nothing, then we're obviously at risk," said David Roth, the Airport Authority's planning and engineering director.

The Omaha airport currently has three pump stations: one on the north side of the airport, one on the east side and one on the southern boundary.

Each pump station is capable of handling water flows to a point, Coufal said, but officials want to increase the airport's pumping capacity and install redundant systems to protect against equipment failure. Workers monitor river and groundwater levels daily.

"This equipment was designed for rain events, storm events," Roth said. "It's extremely heavy equipment, but running it 24-7 for a long duration was not what it was designed for."

Officials have assembled a team of seven contractors and two government agencies, including the City of Omaha and the Corps of Engineers, to construct new defenses, identify potential weaknesses and monitor what is certainly a fluid situation.

The Airport Authority board on Tuesday approved executing contracts with engineering and construction firms on an emergency basis, bypassing normal bid solicitation procedures for the work.

The companies that will work with the airport include HDR Inc. and Hawkins Construction. Other entities have experience in levee design and large-scale design projects of pump station facilities and will lead specific tasks for the airport's contingency plan.

One firm will help pump groundwater off airport property, for example, and other companies will examine levee and groundwater problems or help protect airport property. Airport officials will buy sandbags, generators, pumps and other equipment as the need arises.

There is considerable confidence on the airport board that the assembled team will successfully protect Eppley.

"That's really where the contractors come in, to provide those resources and that knowledge needed for sustainability," Coufal said.

What is still unclear is how much the flood defense work will cost the airport.

Stanley Kathol, the Airport Authority's finance director, said the costs would most likely be absorbed by Eppley's flood insurance policy, federal disaster assistance funds and the airport's operating budget.

"We'll worry about the money later," said the board's chairman, Eric Butler.

Contact the writer:

402-444-1068, johnny.perez@owh.com

Contact the Omaha World-Herald [newsroom](#)

[Start subscription](#) | [Buy today's ePaper](#) | [Subscriber login](#)

Copyright ©2011 Omaha World-Herald®. All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten, displayed or redistributed for any purpose without permission from the Omaha World-Herald.

« [Metro/Region](#)



Search

Narrow search to » [All](#) | [News](#) | [Sports](#) | [Money](#) | [Living](#) | [Go](#) | [More](#) » | [Archive](#)

Site map

<p>Site Index</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Full Index <p>Marketplace</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Jobs Classifieds DealsOmaha Daily Deal Omaha Boocoo Auctions MetroGuide Online Autos Homes Rentals <p>Other Newspapers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Midlands Newspapers 	<p>News</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Area Metro/Region Crime/Courts Community Brad Dickson Nation/World Obituaries Opinion Columnists Data Archive <p>Money</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Money & Markets My Stocks & Funds Inside Business Warren Watch SPN 	<p>Sports</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Big Red Today Bluejays Today Mavs Prep Zone Nighthawks Lancers Storm Chasers National Outdoors CWS State Colleges Chat Tom Shatel Local Golf 	<p>Living</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Momaha Columnists Health Fashion Celebrations Inspired Home Weddings FYI <p>Entertainment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nightlife Music Dining Arts Calendar 	<p>Extras</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Weather Multimedia Subscriber Services All-Access OWH News Products Subscribe ePaper OWHstore Calendar Games & Gadgets News Alerts RSS Data Center Social Media 	<p>Multimedia</p> <p>Video</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> AP video Husker video High School video OWH Video <p>Photos</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> AP Galleries OWH Slideshows Your Photos <p>Live Well Nebraska</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Health & Medicine Fitness & Nutrition Sex & Relationships Health Care Policy Health Insurance Community Forums Health Tools Health Directory Health Jobs Live Well Tour 	<p>Top Blogs</p> <p>Sports</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tom Shatel Big Red Today Lee Barfknecht Bluejays Today NE Prep Zone <p>Entertainment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Kevin Coffey <p>News</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nancy's Almanac
--	---	---	---	--	--	--