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Red Cross, Coast Guard To Assist With Flooding

Red River Expected To Crest Saturday, 22 Feet Above Flood Level

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SAGINAW, Mich. -- Early Friday morning, Coast Guard crew members left their Saginaw Bay station to begin their journey to help people in Fargo, N.D.

And now, the Saginaw Red Cross chapter is getting ready to leave for the flooded region by Saturday morning. Volunteers based out of Saginaw were deployed to help as the Red River spills over its banks, and threatens to put an entire town under water.

Three members of Saginaw's Disaster Services Human Resource team will be leaving out of MBS Airport Saturday morning, making their way to the Fargo, North Dakota Chapter of the American Red Cross to assist in flood relief efforts.

More than 150 families were evacuated Thursday night after a levee sprung a leak.

And unfortunately the wall of water is expected to keep on rising.

Lee Madison, Mike Tate and Cathy Rodammer got the call early Friday morning.

Before shipping out, they got their marching orders and learned what to expect during their three-week stay.

Because the work can be intense, they're gearing up for long work days -- 12 hours minimum -- doing anything from setting up cots, serving food or situating sand bags.

Even so, these three veteran volunteers can't wait to dive in.

Forecasters said the Red River near Fargo is close to cresting at just above 40 feet. The river's flood stage is actually 18 feet.

The last time Fargo was threatened by floods, residents vowed never to go through it again, Karen Whieland said.

But now, she said, "Here we are."

She and her neighbors have been working in soggy yards, trying to keep water out of their homes.

One woman took everything of value from her basement and first floor and moved it upstairs. Tina Kraft said she's as prepared as she can be.

Tim Corwin, whose home is sheltered by sandbags, said he's lived there for 40 years, and now he's facing the prospect of being forced out for good.

The Red Cross is sending more people to the flood zone to operate emergency shelters. But a spokeswoman said it's not necessarily a sign that the agency is expecting a disaster.

National Guard troops on Friday patrolled the dikes protecting Fargo, N.D., looking for possible breaches as the city watched the Red River rise to levels not seen in more than 100 years.

The river had risen to 40.32 feet by early Friday -- more than 22 feet above flood stage and inches more than the previous high water mark of 40.1 feet set in 1897. It's expected to crest a couple of feet higher Saturday.

The city's main dike stood at 43 feet, which is the level of the predicted crest.

Fargo Mayor Dennis Walaker said an extra 800 National Guard troops were called up on top of the 900 troops already in place, and people are being asked to keep the streets clear so that trucks carrying sandbags can get through.

Across the river in Moorhead, Minn., officials have asked about one-third of the households in the city to evacuate.

City spokeswoman Becky Jahnke said the evacuations are sought on the western side of the city, where it borders the river.

Jahnke said about 2,660 households are affected.

Earlier Friday, a dike along the Red River was leaking, causing police in Fargo to order the evacuation of 150 homes in the area.

Fargo police Capt. Tod Dahle said the evacuation was ordered at about 2 a.m. Friday for all houses in a crook of the river south of downtown. It appeared everyone had evacuated by 3:30 a.m.

Dahle said there was a "significant leak" in the dike and its structural integrity was in question. But he said water wasn't rushing into the neighborhood and no houses were being flooded.

Thousands of people have been taking part in an around-the-clock effort of stacking sandbags to protect the city.

In Bismarck, N.D., officials were battling ice jams in the Missouri River. Demolition crews blasted chunks of ice in a bid to open a channel. Officials planned two more rounds of explosives.

President Barack Obama has declared the entire state of North Dakota a disaster area in response to widespread flooding.

To make a donation to relief efforts or learn more about becoming a member of the local and nation disaster response teams, please call your local chapter or visit www.redcross.org.

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