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N e w s R e l e a s e

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Message from Sheriff Champagne

The Mississippi River is expected to rise to historic levels in the next two weeks.

What this means is that the levels are expected to come close to the levels experienced in 1927 and in some locations exceed them. The present levee system and spillways were built in the aftermath of the floods of 1927 in an effort to prevent it from happening again.

Parish officials have been meeting with representatives of the Corps of Engineers, U.S. Coast Guard and the Pontchartrain and Lafourche Levee District, as well as emergency preparedness officials representing local industries.

According to all available information, the consensus of opinion is that our present levee system should maintain its integrity and protect St. Charles Parish from flooding. However, the river levels and levee conditions must be monitored hour by hour and day by day until water levels have safely receded. The proposed opening of the Morganza Spillway will help with reducing river levels in the river parishes and the New Orleans area.

Accordingly, the Corps, parish and levee districts have requested that the St. Charles Parish Sheriff's Office implement enforcement measures to protect the integrity of the river levees.

While bike and walking paths have been provided on the crown of the levee for recreation, we must remember that the purpose of the levee is for flood protection and not recreation. The Corps of Engineers and levee districts are ASKING everyone to REFRAIN from using the levee for walking, jogging and biking.

We will NOT issue citations or force citizens to remove themselves from the levee AT THIS TIME since this is not an ORDER by the Corps. This could change in the days ahead. The reasons for this advisory are for the personal safety of bikers and joggers due to deep water and currents possibly being mere feet from the top of the levee.

Also, the Corps and levee districts wish to make sure that emergency and maintenance / inspection vehicles have unfettered access to the levee.

Even when there is no emergency situation, it is ILLEGAL for unauthorized vehicles to travel on the crown or slope of the levee. This will be STRICTLY ENFORCED, and the drivers of any unauthorized vehicles WILL BE CITED for violating these laws. As the water rises and seeps into the levee itself, excessive vehicular traffic has the potential for compromising the levee.

NO PARKING OR DRIVING of vehicles will be allowed on the slopes and grassy areas of the levee, and any violators will be cited.

The Corps of Engineers has also mandated that there shall be no digging or excavation within 1,500 feet on either side of the crown of the levee.

Finally, we ask that you immediately report to us any unauthorized vehicles or suspicious activity that you might see on or near the levees by calling 911.