

## El Paso residents seek emergency shelter

**AP** Associated Press

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About 1,000 residents of this rain-soaked city were in an emergency shelter Friday, a police spokeswoman said, after officials ordered evacuations amid worries that an eroding earthen dam in Mexico could falter.

Threatened downtown neighborhoods were evacuated after an Army Corps of Engineers estimate that a break in the aging dam, holding water from the Rio Grande in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico, could send up to 6 million gallons rushing across the border into El Paso.

"We're talking like a tidal wave hitting El Paso," Mayor John Cook said after receiving the estimate late Thursday.

El Paso spokeswoman Juliet Lozano said crews in Mexico spent much of the night pumping water out of the area and that American engineers were headed to the dam Friday. But the dam was badly eroded and water was seeping out.

City buses took people to the convention center, which had held Katrina evacuees, Thursday night. Lozano said it was unclear when the approximately 1,500 to 2,000 affected residents would be allowed to return.

Those who refused to leave were not forcibly removed, and about half of the people in the evacuation zones decided to stay, said Detective Elizabeth Molina of the El Paso Police Department. She said the dam posed the only direct flooding threat Friday.

The typically dry city in far West Texas has been inundated by heavy rain and torrential flooding this week. The National Weather Service predicted a 50 percent chance of rain and thunderstorms Friday. As of early Friday morning, a few brief showers had been reported but the dam remained largely intact, Lozano said.

Mexico has declared Ciudad Juarez a natural disaster area. The sister city had another bout with flooding in July.

Gov. Rick Perry announced Thursday that he had asked the federal government to declare El Paso a disaster area after the flooding. He said the necessary paperwork has been sent to President Bush.

U.S. Rep. Silvestre Reyes (news, bio, voting record), D-El Paso, said he also sent the president a letter asking for immediate action.

The governor, who met with emergency officials Thursday, said it was too early to know just how much damage was caused by Tuesday's downpour that soaked mountainside neighborhoods and swelled the Rio Grande to dangerous levels rarely seen in this area.

Reyes estimated the damage totals could top \$250 million. He said he hoped federal funds would pay for an Army Corps of Engineers water drainage study that could help prevent future flooding.

He said officials with the Corps of Engineers and the Federal Emergency Management Agency are already in El Paso "laying the groundwork" for what could be a federal response.

Construction worker Juan Peralta, 31, was killed Thursday as he worked to clear a flooded intersection about 6:30 a.m. when the brakes apparently failed on a tractor-trailer. Rick Glancey, a spokesman for the El Paso County Sheriff's Office, said that while Peralta was working on storm damage, weather was not considered a factor in the crash.

Peralta was the first fatality since a massive storm swamped this West Texas city two days earlier. The El Paso area has received more than 8 1/2 inches of rain this year, almost all of it this week.

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