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Residents ask when they'll get some help

By Diana Washington Valdez / El Paso Times

As rainstorms continue to pound the El Paso area, the sense of frustration among those affected by flooding continues to increase.

City street crews can't seem to get to flooded areas fast enough for hard-hit residents who say they are desperate for help.

"My daughter lost everything -- her home, her furniture. You should have seen it," said Maria Briseño, an Upper Valley resident. "We tried asking for help when the water first started coming in, but no one would help. They kept saying that someone else was responsible, the city, or the county, or whatever. I told them they have no trouble when it comes to collecting our taxes. If they had come in time, my daughter would not have lost everything."

Her daughter's home on Mowad Road was completely flooded. Because the canal water that came rushing down the street had no outlet, the water got inside several homes and reached levels of 4 and 5 feet, the family said.

"Some National Guard soldiers with a truck came to help my daughter get some clothes out of the house. They were shocked by what they saw," Briseño said.

Carmen Carrillo, who lives on Excalibur Drive in Camelot Heights, said "the mountain behind us is going to fall on our home if we don't do something quick. A good Samaritan showed up with a Bobcat, but then a city engineer said he could not remove the mud and rocks from our yard because he needed a permit and we would get cited. Then, someone else different said we did not need a permit. The point, it is not that easy to get help."

Carrillo said insurance companies told her they can't help "because this is a natural disaster and that no one in El Paso is covered for natural disasters."

Daryl Cole, the city's Street Department director, explained that even with additional workers, streets crews are spread thin. They are also facing forecasts of further rain.

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"We are doing all that is humanly possible to get to everyone," Cole said. "We are attacking this with everything we've got."

Cole said workers from El Paso Water Utilities, the Texas Department of Transportation, the military and some private vendors make up the army that has fanned out to remove water, mud and debris from streets and yards throughout the city. "The soldiers are helping to deliver sandbags until more can be done," he said.

Hector Gonzalez, an official with El Paso Water Utilities, said a couple of neighbors on Mulberry Avenue in West El Paso are trapped in their homes by the water outside.

"It's a lake in front. Although water was being pumped out, the water from the (nearby) reservoir kept flowing into the streets, and we could not do anything."

Dozens of El Paso Electric Co. maintenance crews spent the past couple of days responding to reports of downed poles and power outages, said Hector Puente, who is in charge of transmission and distribution. About 1,000 customers in the vicinity of Bassett Place were the latest to experience a power failure Thursday afternoon.

"What we've been trying to do is restore power as soon as possible," he said. "Some of our employees have flooded yards, too, but they are giving up their personal lives to help others."

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