

UPDATE - Non-Breach Emergency at the Columbia Lock and Dam

The US Army Corps of Engineers Vicksburg District has extended the non-breach emergency at the Columbia Lock and Dam located on the Ouachita River approximately seven miles upstream of Columbia, LA. The declaration allowed the Corps to adjust water levels upstream and downstream of the lock and dam to investigate concerns while safely operating the structure for the navigation industry.

Emergency contracts were executed and substantial amounts of rock (more than 500 tons of stone) placed (end of October/first of November) underneath the exterior lock wall chamber. The result of this action significantly decreased the amount of flow of material underneath the lock chamber. The extent of the void, however, remains an unknown until additional tests and investigations are complete.

As part of the initial declaration, the pool above Columbia Lock and Dam was lowered by approximately three feet, while the pool below the dam was raised by approximately two feet. The pool adjustments, which began August 20, 2024, will remain at those levels and continue for the foreseeable future.

As a result of the investigation, it was determined that pool levels will remain at the restricted pool levels until the stability of the structure can be guaranteed. The change in pool level will not significantly impact commercial navigation, and the lock will continue to operate. Additional long-term investigations are needed to further evaluate the stability of the structure. Once the investigations are complete and data processed, pool restrictions will be re-evaluated.

The pool adjustments are based on the head differential between the upper and lower pool at the Columbia Lock and Dam. As winter rains increase the level and flow through the Ouachita River, the upper pool will be allowed to gradually increase as levels in the lower pool rise.

USACE's initial timeline is to complete all investigations and data processing by the fall of 2025 to determine the necessary course of action.

ORVA orchestrated a TEAMS meeting with the local community and river stakeholders on December 1 and has continued to monitor the situation on an almost daily basis. The Vicksburg District's US Army Corps of Engineers, is fully aware of this issue and greatly appreciates the patience and understanding of all concerned during this process.

ORVA will continue to monitor the situation and provide information to stakeholders and customers as it becomes available.

David Weeks
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