



Driving rains lead to flash floods, local evacuations

Peggy Kreimer and Ellen Lord, Post staff reporters

Nearly 3 inches of rain fell in a few hours Thursday, swelling Kenton County's Doe Run Lake to within 5 feet of its emergency spillway and prompting a state of emergency.

Police banged on doors along Old Ky. 17 telling residents to evacuate. The dam wasn't in danger, but officials worried that more rain would send the lake over the spillway and flood the valley below.

Doe Run empties into a small creek

that merges about a mile later with

Banklick Creek, which already was

churning out of its banks and pouring

Houses on the banks of the Banklick became islands. In Pioneer Park, water more than 4 feet high covered all but the top of the bleachers. Downed trees and upside-down picnic tables raced through the current like speed boats.

The rain started gently in scattered areas at 5:43 a.m. By 7 a.m. it was steady, and by 11 a.m. it had caused flash floods around Northern Kentucky.

Kenton County Public Works employees were cutting weeds at Pioneer Park when it became evident that the creek was going to flood. Employees from across Kenton County were called to help chain picnic tables and move equipment in preparation for what turned out to be the first big flood of the season.

The park took on water several times last year, the worst sending trees and cars cascading into ball field backstops.

"It took three to four weeks to clean it up last year," said Jerry Kitch, of the Kenton County Public Works.

Across the park on Old Ky. 17, 15-year-old Heather Carson listened to the rain pounding on the roof and watched the creek creep closer to the house.

"I called my mom at work and told her to get home fast," she said, eyes wide.

Her mother, Carol Carson, is a founder of Neighbors Fighting for Flood Control - a group of Banklick Creek neighbors trying to get the county to address their annual flooding problems.

Mrs. Carson threw her organizational scrapbook in the car and gathered her children. "I'm taking them to my mother's," she said.

After last year's flood, which sent the family to the roof for several hours in the middle of the night, Heather is uneasy around rising water, Mrs. Carson said.

The Carsons believe a major reason for the increased flooding is subdivision development in higher elevation areas. Residents are considering a lawsuit.

The driving rain stopped for a while about 1 p.m., but water continued to drain from hills, driveways, streets and parking lots, creating waterfalls over roadsides and pouring across pavement into the teeming creek.

Kenton County Disaster and Emergency Services set up a command post at the Kenton County Animal Shelter. Boone County Water Rescue brought boats, "just in case we'd need them in a hurry," said Kenton County Police Capt. Ed Butler.

One family had to be evacuated by a fire department water tanker and several other people were brought across flooded roads in Kenton County Public Works trucks.

Police ordered the low-lying areas around Doe Run Lake dam evacuated about 3 p.m. and the Red Cross set up an emergency shelter at a nearby Methodist Church.

A van of volunteer inmates from the Kenton County Detention Center rolled up to the command center, ready to work.

"We want to be ready for anything," Butler said.

Police and firefighters from Covington, Ft. Wright and Erlanger were on site.

Gretchen Bartley, environmental inspector with the Kentucky Division of Water, had walked the rim of Doe Run Lake dam earlier in the day and became the resident expert on what was happening behind the 112-foot-high dam.

"The dam is in good shape," she said.

But emergency workers were worried about flooding if the lake rose over the emergency spillway, which would allow excess water to cascade out. "That's what the spillway is designed to do," Ms. Bartley said.

After the water reaches the emergency spillway, the lake still has another 19 feet to rise before it would go over the top of the dam.

"This dam is designed to take 28 inches of rain within six hours. It's not going to break," she said in response to question after question about the dam possibly failing.

By 4 p.m., weather reports had cut back the possibility of more rain, and water was receding. "We're letting people back in," said Butler, as he lifted the evacuation order.

The county's Disaster and Emergency Services van remained an open command post, but the tension

was gone with the water. Officers and emergency workers traded phone numbers as they headed home.

"I guess it wasn't as bad as we thought," Ms. Bartley said. "But if we err, I'd rather err on the side of safety."

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[Return to the Front Page](#)

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