

Update on Levee Certification
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The Preliminary DFIRMs produced for the city of Salina were prepared based on the presumption that the city's flood control levee, which was found to provide protection from a 100 year storm in 1986, continued to provide 100 year protection. However, FEMA placed a burden on communities participating in the National Flood Insurance Program to prove or provide certification from a professional engineer that their levee system continues to provide a 100 year level of protection. Flood maps in communities with Provisionally Accredited Levees (PAL) such as Salina contain the following PAL note:

“WARNING, this levee, dike, or other structure has been provisionally accredited and mapped as providing protection from the 1-percent-annual-chance flood. To maintain accreditation, the levee owner or community is required to submit documentation necessary to comply with 44 CFR Section 65.10 by September 30, 2010. Because of the risk of overtopping or failure of the structure, communities should take proper precautions to protect lives and minimize damages in these areas, such as issuing an evacuation plan and encouraging property owners to purchase flood insurance.“

The City of Salina had a PAL Agreement with FEMA that ran from September 2008 to September 2010. Because of the complexity and cost of levee certification, the city of Salina did not complete certification of its levee system within the two year time frame. As a result, FEMA has now initiated a new flood plain mapping project to remap the city as if the levee system does not provide 100 year protection. If the flood control levee had not been built, most of the city between the Smoky Hill River and I-135 would be located within a mapped 100 year flood plain.

To avoid this result, the Salina City Commission has entered into an agreement with AMEC Earth and Environmental Services for the engineering services necessary to determine whether the city's flood control levee can be “certified” as meeting all of FEMA's levee criteria. This work is currently underway with a goal of having a completed certification report in the fall of 2012.

In the meantime, AMEC has also been hired by FEMA to prepare new flood maps based on the flood control levee not providing protection from a 100 year flood on the Smoky Hill River and West Dry Creek/ Mulberry Creek. After completing its levee freeboard analysis and interior drainage analysis, AMEC will actually produce two sets of flood maps, one set assuming no levee system protection and one set assuming the levee system provides 100 year flood protection.

In the summer of 2011 Congress intervened and blocked FEMA from preparing and issuing flood maps for communities with levees as if the levees did not exist or provide any protection. Congress directed FEMA to develop new criteria for non-certified levees. New LIDAR topography has been completed for the new mapping project and is undergoing third party quality control review. However, the flood plain mapping work being undertaken by AMEC is on hold until new levee mapping methodologies are adopted by FEMA.

The City of Salina is continuing to diligently pursue getting the levee “certified” as providing protection from a 100 year storm.