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Flood concerns eased in Cathedral City with new dam

Engineers say Eagle Canyon Dam is now providing protection against any potential 100-year flood event

Jeff Stahl, KESQ News Channel 3 Morning News Anchor, jstahl@kesq.com

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CATHEDRAL CITY, Calif. -

A new Cathedral City flood control project is now providing flood control protection for the homes and businesses below it.

Engineers say the Eagle Canyon Dam has taken longer than expected to build, but is worth the wait.

It's now providing improved flood control for an area along East Palm Canyon Drive that has seen damage from repeated flash flooding.

It's still not complete, but it is on budget.

A raging flood most recently carried mud and debris across East Palm Canyon Drive on August 30, 2012.

Several businesses were flooded along with residents at the Tramview Mobile Home Park.

A similar flooding event also caused damage in July of 2008, but won't likely happen again according to Robert Cullen, Chief of Design and Construction Division for the Riverside County Flood Control & Water Conservation District.

Cullen said about the dam, "It's completely functional. It will work, we essentially have 100 year protection right now."

The \$8.9 million project eliminated the flood threat to the nearby homes and businesses from the rocky and barren hillsides above the city.

Construction was delayed by nearly a year because of a longer-than expected process to remove debris from an illegal dump and a practice target shooting range.

Builders also overcame some geologic concerns including different rock formations than expected near the dam and the discovery of three new earthquake fault lines.

The faults were discovered while crews dug the earthen structure out of the canyon.

The discoveries brought construction to a stand-still while geologists investigated and determined they were not considered active.

Geologists believe the faults haven't moved in hundreds of thousands of years.

Cullen said the challenges were all easily mitigated with good engineering practices.

"Dam construction in particular, you have to deal with things as you find them," Cullen said, adding, "there's no way you can do enough investigation to determine every single variable."

Even with the delays, the 85-foot dam structure is nearly topped out at 55-feet, its crest already stretching 370-feet across the canyon.

It's capable of holding back up to 185-acre feet of flood waters and 14-acre feet of debris.

It will normally be dry, but can handle an inflow of water equal to filling 50-swimming pools every minute.

Below the dam, Deanna Sanders of Celebrity Consignment remembers rushing to keep water and mud out of her store August 30, 2012, the day before it's grand opening.

She's happy for the new dam.

"I think it leaves us a little more at ease, Sanders said adding, "hopefully we won't get anymore rains. Hopefully what they've done so far is going to keep it at bay."

Most of the soil hauled out of Eagle Canyon was put back into the dam structure.

It will now be topped off with huge boulders, also from the canyon, and stained to match the surrounding hill sides.

A second phase of the project, a \$4-million pipe next year will connect the dam to the White Water River wash.

Cullen said, "as a result of this project and that outlet pipe we'll be able to revise the Fema Flood plain."

That will bring an additional benefit in the form of lower flood insurance rates for homes and businesses in the immediate area.

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Cathedral City shows off new Eagle Canyon Dam

But some neighboring businesses say they're still hurting financially following construction

Jeff Stahl, KESQ News Channel 3 Morning News Anchor, jstahl@kesq.com

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CATHEDRAL CITY, Calif. -

Cathedral City's new Eagle Canyon flood control dam is now officially completed.

City and Riverside County leaders gathered Thursday morning for a traditional ribbon-cutting ceremony, and tours, to mark the occasion.

Riverside County 4th District Supervisor, John Benoit, said "I'm told, in January, if we hadn't got this done we'd have had another chance to drive in mud on Highway 111."

Benoit wasn't alone in praising the \$10.6 million project's completion.

Mayor Stan Henry said the new dam, "will also help lower the flood insurance rates for not only the residents but also the businesses along East Palm Canyon."

A series of flash floods have washed across Cathedral city's East Palm Canyon Drive over the years, the most recent in August of 2012.

It stranded motorists and flooded nearby homes and businesses with water and mud.

Officials at Thursday's event said that type of flooding won't happen here anymore.

But several nearby businesses along Perez Road, just to the east of the dam, are still struggling financially.

They say they suffered great financial losses during construction of the \$5 million outlet pipeline.

Matt Finnell of Valley Smog and Auto Repair said the contractors who built the underground pipeline next to his business, and down his access road, made it nearly impossible for customers to reach his business for months.

Finnell said, "From the data that we have from the year before, day over day sales, we lost close to \$100 thousand. And we don't know how many customers we've lost beyond that."

The pipeline project was started last April and was completed just last month, several months later than it's september timeline.

"Oh it's really difficult," said Finnell. "Just trying to make it month to month as a small business. You're already working on small margins as it is," Finnell added.

Supervisor Benoit wouldn't comment on specifics about the Perez Road businesses, or their claims against the contractor, Granite Construction.

Benoit did say, "Obviously there's legal actions pending. We try to minimize as much as possible the impacts."

Benoit added, Granite performed well and did what it could to minimize inconveniences for motorists, residents and businesses along East Palm Canyon.

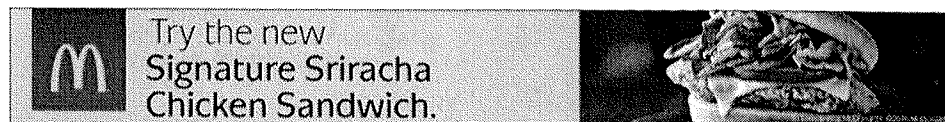
Even with the financial damages to sort out, the Eagle Canyon Dam and Debris Basin is designed to provide protection from a 100-year flood event, an inflow rate equal to filling 50-swimming pools per minute.

Officials say that should make flash floods below the dam a thing of the past.

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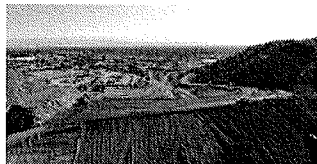
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Eagle Canyon Dam nears completion

CATHEDRAL CITY, Calif. - A new Cathedral City flood control project is now providing flood control protection for the homes and businesses below it.

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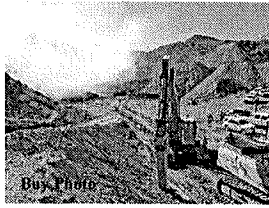
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Eagle Canyon Dam in Cathedral City doing its job

Sherry Barkas, The Desert Sun 9:43 p.m. PDT September 8, 2014



(Photo: Jay Calderon/The Desert Sun file)

Storms like Monday's (</story/weather/2014/09/08/coachell-valley-storms-flooding-rescues-closed-schools-roads/15317253/>) that once delivered floods and layers of mud to East Palm Canyon Drive in Cathedral City, forcing road closures and damaging homes and businesses, are now passing over with little impact.

Eagle Canyon Dam was completed in July. Though work continues on the spillway and the Line 43 drainage system has yet to be laid, officials and area residents say the difference is like night and day.

The \$9.8 million dam is being paid for with Riverside County flood control funds. The dam is designed to protect the city from a 100-year flood and send the water into the Palm Springs flood control system. It is 405 feet above sea level and designed to hold 222 acre-feet of water and 14 acres of debris.

The spillway should be finished by early 2015, said Chris Parman, communications and events manager for Cathedral City.

The Line 43 drainage system, connecting Eagle Canyon to the Cathedral Canyon Channel, will go out to bid in the next 30 to 60 days and be completed by this time next year, Riverside County Supervisor John Benoit said.

It will require digging up East Palm Canyon Drive near Perez Road to create a large underground channel. Traffic will be affected during construction but the road will remain open, he said.

"That will move water more expeditiously into the channel and keep it off the streets," Benoit said.

The line is expected to cost another \$5.2 million and will be covered by county flood control funds already set aside, he said.

Even without the line, the improvement is vastly different from when Benoit was trudging through 6-inch deep mud following a storm in August 2012.

That thunderstorm sent a rushing mini-river into Tramview Mobile Home Park and neighboring businesses that led Benoit to call an emergency meeting to get the funds for the dam pushed through. Construction started in May 2013.

It was a storm that dumped 1.3 inches of rain over 24 hours this past August that told officials the dam is doing its job.

Ed Campbell, a manager at Tramview, had been living at the mobile home park just four months and was out of town during this past August's storm. He had seen video and photos of damage past storms had done to the park and drove home expecting the worst.

"I was surprised," he said. "We were not affected at all."

A slow-moving thunderstorm that passed over much of the Coachella Valley on Monday morning flooded roads throughout the valley, including several in Cathedral City, but didn't drop much rain in the East Palm Canyon area, Parman said.

"I think most of the rain happened north of Ramon Road," he said.

Desert Sun reporter Sherry Barkas covers the cities of Desert Hot Springs and Cathedral City. She can be reached at sherry.barkas@thedesertsun.com or (760) 778-4694. Follow her on Twitter @TDSsherry

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Dam Changes County Flood Zone

Posted: Mar 10, 2016 7:03 PM PST
Updated: Mar 10, 2016 7:03 PM PST

By Kitty Alvarado, Video Journalist [CONNECT](#)

CATHEDRAL CITY, Ca. - Leaders cut the ribbon on the Eagle Canyon Dam in Cathedral City on Thursday. The multi-million dollar project took two years to complete. Engineers say the dam is meant to withstand a 100 year storm.

After storms tore through the area devastating businesses and homes in 2012 the city and county got to work on the project to prevent future damage.

Riverside County Supervisor John Benoit says now that the dam is in place the flood zone map will be redrawn, saving homeowners and business owners on their flood insurance.

Former Cathedral City Mayor Kathleen DeRosa says property that was rendered worthless by the flood zone is now viable for future development.

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