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Photos by Bob Owen / San Antonio Express-News

City workers set up a barricade at Overbrook and Danville on Friday. This week's rains have pushed the city's precipitation total for the year to 17.1 inches, well above the norm of 9.7.

Plenty of rainfall, but fewer problems

Projects seem to be reducing flooding

By John W. Gonzalez
STAFF WRITER

Bexar County's \$500 million flood control initiative, which has raised public awareness of high-water dangers, appears to be paying off at several chronic problem areas, officials said Friday.

This week's drought-busting precipitation that left the city's rainfall total for the year at 7.4 inches above average produced no major problems, although many low water crossings were inundated as usual.

It's the next inevitable major flood that officials are most concerned



Rain collects in the unfinished Laddie Place III stormwater retention facility on Fredericksburg Road. The site should be completed in the summer.

about, and they're increasingly convinced that recent drainage upgrades will reduce perils in another big storm like the deadly inundations of 2013, 2002 and 1998.

The county is in the eighth year of a 10-year construction program with 80 projects, including a \$30 million stormwater retention pond at 3700 Fredericksburg Road, a \$7.4 million bridge on Ingram Road

over Leon and Huebner creeks, and \$4 million in upgrades to Olmos Dam.

"The flood control program is performing as we intended it to," County Engineer Renee Green said Friday.

"The lack of calls, the smaller number of high-water issues that come up, are a result of the program," she said. "We are alleviating a lot of problems at low water

Flooding continues on A17

Rains no friends of old septic systems

By Lynn Brezosky
STAFF WRITER

Heavy rains mean "tiptoe around the septic system" for those built before regulations ensured that such systems functioned properly in the San Antonio region's rocky soil.

Kerry Dike, a homeowner in the older section of Shavano Park, says her four-person household is going on alternate-day showers and low-to-no laundry days until things dry up.

It's a neighborhood headache that dates back to the 1950s, when municipalities including Shava-

Septic continues on A17

Blue Bell's layoffs tough for hometown

Outbreak spurs furloughs, too

By Mark Collette
HOUSTON CHRONICLE

Blue Bell Creameries on Friday announced a massive round of layoffs and furloughs across multiple states that will be felt keenly in its hometown of Brenham, already hurt by cuts in other industries.

The layoffs affect 750 full-time and 700 part-time employees, with furloughs for an additional 1,400 — moves that reach nearly 75 percent of the Texas-based compa-

ny's workforce.

It seemed an almost inevitable day of reckoning because a listeria outbreak dogging the company since March has halted production, likely for months longer.

For a company that prides itself on work ethic and loyalty, the cuts stung all the more for some because of past assurances.

"In our entire history, we've never had layoffs. It's not happening now," spokeswoman Jenny Van

Blue Bell continues on A17



FBI / New York Times

Death is punishment for bomber

A federal jury condemns Boston Marathon bomber Dzhokhar Tsarnaev for deadly attack. **A8**

Bills on grading, fixing schools OK'd

By Lauren McGaughey
AUSTIN BUREAU

AUSTIN — With most Capitol watchers distracted this week by issues such as same-sex marriage and annexation, the House quietly passed two important education bills, including a proposal to grade campuses on an A-F scale while overhauling how those grades are determined.

The other bill, which would put tough mandates on districts to turn

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around their failing schools, passed Wednesday with little debate or notice. It could force seven Texas schools to face closure or emergency supervision.

Originally, House Bill 2804, the A-F accountability measure, sought only to revamp the way *Education continues on A4*

FLOODING

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crossings.”

A key part of the program is the \$5.3 million HALT system, with warning systems at 50 low water crossings. Most are in suburban areas where its cumbersome to place — and remove — temporary barricades during storms.

Friday, for example, warning flashers automatically were activated at a few of the 50 crossings, all of which can be monitored on the Internet. The Bexar County Commissioners Court, which authorized the flood program in 2007, recently expanded the HALT system to 90 more sites, most of them in San Antonio.

Many of the program's biggest projects are in San Antonio, often straddling multiple political boundaries that sometimes made it difficult to achieve action on vast, costly construction efforts.

One unforeseen benefit of having so many projects, each involving multiple community meetings with affected residents and businesses, is that they “created a public awareness that didn't exist before,” Green said.

“People are developing safer driving habits,” she said.

County and city officials were closely monitoring this week's storms, which boosted the city's official rainfall amount for the year to 17.1 inches, well above the norm of 9.7. The increase is attributed to a weak El Niño weather pattern.

Yet because the rainfall largely has been slow and

“The lack of calls, the smaller number of high-water issues that come up, are a result of the (flood control) program. We are alleviating a lot of problems at low water crossings.”

Bexar County Engineer Renee Green

steady, some of the county's anti-flood measures haven't fully been tested.

The retention facility on Fredericksburg Road, which had been called the Laddie Place III regional stormwater retention facility during development, is nearing completion. When finished this summer, it'll be known as the Old Spanish Walking Trails and Flood Control Basin. Designed to impound water that would flood nearby Woodlawn Lake, the vast pond won't be fully engaged unless there's a major deluge.

That project, along with the Ingram Road bridge that puts motorists well above flood danger, are two of the most significant projects, Green said.

Still, even when the construction program finishes, more work awaits. When the program started, \$2 billion to \$3 billion in flood-related improvements were identified.

“We're not done yet,” Green said.

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