

Flood Awareness Month – PODCAST 2: Flooding in 2011

RUN TIME: 2 MIN, 25 SECONDS

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JEFF JOHNSON: Well, last year of course we had a pretty big snow pack across Minnesota and northern Iowa and we were expecting some pretty decent flooding in central and eastern Iowa, and it really didn't materialize as bad as we thought, so–

JEFF ZOGG: Right. There was a point in time last year where there was a considerable amount of concern in the National Weather Service about the possibility for flooding and it turned out to be not that bad and one of the reasons was because the heavy rainfall was lacking. We did have a lot of snowfall. A lot of people can remember the snow that was on the ground a year ago, and obviously it melted, melted fast in some locations. But the ground was not frozen very deeply in most locations, relatively dry – at least able to absorb additional moisture. So because it wasn't frozen was able to take on moisture. A lot of that water that we thought would run off directly into the streams ended up going into the ground, thereby lessening the – I guess the “pulse” of water, if you will, that was going into the streams.

JEFF JOHNSON: Last spring, unlike what happened on the Mississippi and some of the Iowa basins where the flooding was less, it seemed that the flooding was worse in the Missouri basin than perhaps we thought. And we know we had a pretty good snow pack at the beginning of the season, but it would appear that the impacts were actually worse than what we thought going into last spring in that watershed.

JEFF ZOGG: Sure. The Missouri River flood last year ended up being a lot worse than many entities thought it would be early on last winter and what happened was of course we had the really deep snow pack across the upper Missouri Basin and the Rocky Mountains. But then we had record amounts of rainfall that fell almost coincident with the snow pack across the Dakotas into eastern Montana – again, when that snow was melting. If it was just the snow by itself or just the rain by itself, things would not have been as bad as they were along the Missouri River. But it was a combination of the snow melt and the heavy rainfall that combined to produce the really serious flooding that we had, and prolonged flooding, along the Missouri River basin.

Once we were aware of this, we did initiate communications with Iowa Homeland Security and county emergency managers, worked with state partners. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers obviously was a big player since they operate the reservoirs on the Missouri River – and they were an integral part of the process, too. We were in constant communication with the Army Corps of Engineers, feeding them information also as far as forecast rainfall amounts – realizing that quantitatively, it's difficult to forecast rainfall amounts beyond a couple days with any accuracy but we were definitely doing the best that we could. We were actually embedded with the Corps of Engineers in their operations center in Omaha, Nebraska. We had a full-time presence there to provide briefings and meteorological input.