

LOOP FLOODING



At nine o'clock on this Monday 9th of April emergency crews continue to work feverishly to fight the subterranean flood waters that have crippled Chicago's Loop. This is a live picture from the Kinzie Street bridge where a leak in the tunnel system beneath the Chicago River spewed millions and millions of gallons of water into Loop buildings. Electricity cut, buildings damaged, and losses that may run into the hundreds of millions of dollars.

Good evening everybody, glad you're with us tonight. I'm Chris Law.

And I'm Robin Robinson. It is bound to go down in history as the great Chicago underground flood. Tonight hundreds of emergency workers are scrambling to staunch the flow that has already pumped millions of gallons of water out of the Chicago river. Businesses and skyscrapers closed and the Loop commuter travel crippled and now officials are saying it may be 48 hours before power is fully restored to blacked-out areas.

In a special one-hour edition of Fox News, Chicago, we will have the latest on the investigation into what happened and why. We'll show you what police are doing to protect the downtown area that resembles a darkened ghost town. We'll look at the monumental cost to downtown businesses, including the world's tallest building forced to shut down. Also we'll review today's nightmare for commuters and give you some clues on what to expect with the morning rush hour and some tips on how to get to work if you're going.

We have several stories. We begin with Lilia Chacon who's standing by live on the banks of the Chicago river where the flood first began and where efforts continue to try to plug the leak. Lilia, what's the latest?

The latest is some very good news. A gentleman from the Streets and Sanitation Department told us just minutes ago that apparently the repair efforts are succeeding, the water level inside the tunnel has dropped by a foot. Behind me you can see some heavy equipment that is building an – earthen ramp out to where the leak is at the river bed. They will build a – a – ramp, and then an earthen dyke around the suspected leak. They will – er – separate the river, keep – er – try to dry it out and then begin to repair the area where, just before rush hour this morning, the river bed gave way and caved in to a 100-year-old coal tunnel.

This spinning vortex of river water and debris marks the spot under the Kinzie Street bridge where millions of gallons of Chicago river burst through the river bottom and into a vast network of ancient coal tunnels. More than 40 miles of old coal tunnels wind through the downtown area just 40 feet below

the city streets. In recent years the tunnels have been used to house computer and telephone wiring. But this morning the buildings and basements hooked up to the system began filling with up to 40 feet of water. A mass evacuation was ordered and power was completely shut off. By midmorning 5 city departments and 2 private contractors were trying to plug the leak working with heavy equipment floating on a barge in midriver.

Bob PAWELKO, Action Cement

- We're trying to – er – slow the leak by pouring-pouring in these 8-to-10-inch limestone blocks into the hole to create a bridge so that we can pour a rap-rapid-set concrete on the top of it and the heat will close the cracks in between the rocks and seal them like a tyre.

- How big is the hole?

- As far as – they told us it's about the size of a car.

Mayor Daley toured the scene in the company of his newly-named police chief Mat Rodriguez.

Governor Edward arrived in mid-afternoon and said he would take action tomorrow to declare the area a disaster relief site. Then at a City Hall press conference the mayor angrily refused to assess the blame :

Richard DALEY, mayor

- We are not gonna get into who is to blame for what happened, 'cause we don't know as yet ! That's why. That's why. This is a - this is a very serious problem. Don't make it funny ! (..) Yes you are ! This is a very serious problem, and when we stop the water from leakage we will assess who is responsible. At this time we cannot give any answers who is responsible.

But one source who poured the tunnels beneath the Kinzie Street bridge in January told Fox News that recently installed pylons had pierced the wall of the tunnel, and water and clay were leaking in. The city's chief of staff, Dave Mosena, tonight admitted knowing about minor leakage for some time.

Dave MOSENA

- There had been knowledge of a leak in this area. It was – er – it did not appear to be a – a significant leak at that point. Early on there was – er – several wee – a couple weeks ago there was some indication that there was some – water.