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THE VOICE OF THE VALLEY SINCE 1909

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75¢

## Community helps avert flood disaster



TVN Photo/Ken Levy

Volunteers fill sandbags at the Driggs sewer lagoons Tuesday evening. The lagoons were in danger of overflowing after floodwater from Darby Creek infiltrated through manhole covers.

**Ken Levy**  
TVN Staff

A potential disaster was averted Tuesday night as 164 volunteers from throughout the valley helped sandbag the Driggs sewer lagoons.

Raw sewage water rose to the top of the lagoons and threatened to overflow after floodwaters from Darby Creek infiltrated the sewer system through manhole covers, said Jared Gunderson, Driggs public works director.

"The [sewer] water is even with the top of the lagoon," he said.

Normally, the lagoons are kept three feet below the top.

Wade Kaufman of MD Landscaping, one of the first people on the scene at the

Bates Road facility, said he was scrambling to get volunteers out for sandbagging duties at around 6 p.m. His own basement was flooded, he said.

Jay Mazalewski, Teton County engineer, led the early arrivals in filling sandbags and trained some of them on the proper way to fill and place them for maximum effectiveness.

Monte Woolstenhulme, superintendent of the Teton School District, said he sent out a mass text message for volunteer help and contacted local church leaders for their assistance.

"Many volunteers got here before I did," he said.

By about 7:30 p.m., the crowd of volunteers was well into the task, filling, hauling and placing sandbags around the

perimeter of the two lagoons. Others filled wheelbarrows with sand and hauled them to be dumped at strategic low spots in the perimeter. Still others loaded trucks with bags of sand to be delivered to far corners of the lagoons, hand-delivered hundreds of empty sandbags or hauled cases of water to thirsty volunteers.

Kaufman guided large side-loading dump trucks into the areas with the most immediate need of their sandy load, and volunteers shoveled and spread the berms of sand over a layer of sandbags for added protection against the lapping sewer water.

Crowds of shovel-wielding volunteers stood ready as dump trucks tilted their loads out. Strangers, families and friends

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### WEATHER THIS WEEK

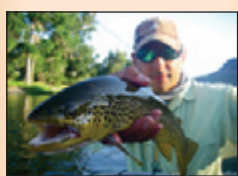


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TVN Photo/Ken Levy

Volunteers spread sand over sandbags to help reinforce protection of the lagoons' perimeter.

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became teammates as they held bags open with large funnels, shoveled the sand in or hauled the filled bags into position.

Teton County firefighters worked sandbag brigades, passing filled bags from hand to hand until they were placed along the perimeter or loaded into waiting pickups or on trailers, to be hauled to areas with the most need.

Earlier, county crews dug a ditch across the frontage road at 3000 South to relieve the pressure of the pent-up waters that have hindered drivers along Highway 33 from about 3500 South to about 2000 South for several days.

"The cut should help relieve infiltration through the manhole covers," said Gunderson. By Wednesday morning, county crews had widened and deepened the ditch.

Driggs Mayor Dan Powers, who helped direct the sandbagging effort, said overflowing sewer water could have gotten into nearby creeks. The city had informed the Department of Environmental Quality and the Environmental Protection Agency of the problem.

"They know we're doing all we can," he said.

The city council cancelled its regular meeting Tuesday night, as councilmen George Mosher and Greer Jones joined the front lines of sandbaggers. Teton County Commissioner Kathy Rinaldi shoveled load after load of sand into waiting wheelbarrows and helped reinforce sand berms, and crews operating skip loaders moved loads of sand into position.



TVN Photo/Ken Levy

Joie Schauster helps her daughter, Mary Rose, 4, move sandbags into position at the Driggs sewer lagoons Tuesday evening.

By Wednesday morning the situation was well under control, Gunderson said. Volunteers had laid "easily a couple of thousand bags" around about a quarter-mile of perimeter.

"This could have been a real catastrophe," he said. "We acted at the

right time. [The sewage water] would have gone over this morning."

Gunderson urged citizens not to pump sump water into the sewers. The practice is illegal and can lead to further problems.

"One person was pumping 3,000 gallons an hour. That adds up," he said.

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TVN Photo/Ken Levy

Volunteers, including Monte Woolstenhulme, superintendent of the Teton School District (in white shirt, left) fill sandbags at the Driggs sewer lagoons Tuesday evening. The lagoons were in danger of overflowing after floodwater from Darby Creek infiltrated through manhole covers. Woolstenhulme put out a mass text message through the district, and contacted LDS church leaders, asking for volunteers.