



FEMA

Moving People Out of Harm's Way

Kenosha County, WI – An excerpt from a May 2000 emergency bulletin announced: “Residents are strongly urged to evacuate until river levels subside.... Rapidly-rising swift currents will provide an extreme danger to residents and responders.” This announcement is a common occurrence for residents of Kenosha County, Wisconsin living along the Fox River between Highway 50 and Highway F. Low-lying land in this region is plagued by frequent, dangerous floods that threaten the safety of the residents and cause severe damage to homes.

The Illinois Fox River rises near Menomonee Falls, Wisconsin and flows through Waukesha, Racine, and Kenosha Counties in southeast Wisconsin for a total of 70 miles before entering Illinois. There are two rivers in Wisconsin called the Fox River. This particular river is designated as the Illinois Fox River by local residents as it flows out of Wisconsin and into Illinois. Flooding is common in Kenosha County, Wisconsin along the river, especially near the Towns of Wheatland and Salem and the Village of Silver Lake.

During the middle of the 20th century, the riverside was valued as a vacation or weekend get-away spot and many people from nearby cities built rustic cabins on the banks of the river. Later, as the area’s population grew, some families built year-round residences and even more constructed weekend cabins. The waterfront properties were occasionally flooded, but the owners kept coming back to clean up and rebuild. The river area provided the scenic beauty and outdoor recreation they treasured.

The private property in this floodplain has created an “urban interface” problem similar to those in the forested lands of America’s western states. Having a population adjacent to or in an area that frequently experiences natural disasters puts stress on local emergency management and law enforcement as well as public works.

When extensive, heavy rains enter the watershed for the Illinois Fox River, Kenosha County emergency management personnel and law enforcement officers keep steady contact with the National Weather Service to receive constant updates about rainfall and river-level predictions. When the river rises to hazardous flood-stage levels, the County Executive issues an emergency declaration to set in motion safety procedures to protect citizens in the path of floodwaters. During emergency declarations, county law enforcement officers personally warn residents of the imminent danger of fast-moving floodwaters and are prepared to provide help to evacuate them to safety if the need arises. The officers patrol the flooding areas in four-wheel drive vehicles carrying personal flotation devices in case people need assistance. During rescue efforts in the 1994 floods, a rescue boat flipped over in a fast-running current. Luckily, no one was killed in the incident.



Kenosha County, Wisconsin



Quick Facts

- Year: **1993**
- Sector: **Public/Private Partnership**
- Cost: **\$7,000,000.00 (Actual)**
- Primary Activity/Project: **Acquisition/Buyouts**
- Primary Funding: **Flood Mitigation Assistance (FMA)**