

**Drill to test flood walls around Market House
Annapolis bought barriers after storm damaged building in 2003**



In 2003, Tropical Storm Isabel damaged Market House in Annapolis. The city has purchased flood walls to help protect retail space and will test them tomorrow. They have long been used in Europe but Annapolis is the first to do so in the U.S., a flood wall distributor said. (AP file photo / September 19, 2003)

By Nicole Fuller | sun reporter
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In an attempt to protect one of the city's prominent seaside retail spaces under threat from flooding, Annapolis city officials will debut "flood walls" in a practice drill tomorrow morning.

The city has purchased the system to protect Market House, which was heavily damaged when Tropical Storm Isabel struck four years ago.

Flood walls have been used for decades in Europe, namely Prague, a city that has suffered from significant flooding. They are large tubes made of heavy-duty rubberized fabric and are designed to be used as a rapidly installed barrier to flood waters.

"The great thing about it is they're virtually indestructible and you can use them over and over again," said Ray Weaver, a spokesman for Annapolis Mayor Ellen O. Moyer.

Annapolis is the first U.S. jurisdiction to use the technology, which has been tested by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, said Richard A. James, vice president for sales at KJK International, the North American distributor for the product.

Much like the more traditional sandbags, flood walls, which are filled with water, act as a counterweight against the structure, buffering it from flood waters, James said.

Unlike sandbags, however, flood walls are reusable, require less manpower and have no immediate environmental impact, James said.

The standard size of a flood wall is 3 1/2 feet by 18 feet and can expand up to 10 inches when compressed.

The city has purchased 34 of them, which will run the perimeter of the building. After a flood, the tubes are drained and stored for reuse.

City officials are calling the purchase of the tubes a proactive move in protecting buildings from flooding caused by hurricanes or other storms.

According to a January 2007 report by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, which conducted tests to determine the product's effectiveness: "The units installed very quickly and appear to be an efficient and economical means of raising levees or otherwise providing protection against rising flood waters."

Tomorrow's drill will begin about 6:30 a.m. with a warning of a high tide. The warning will activate employees from the city's Department of Public Works to bring the equipment to the Market House and begin filling them with water.

Officials anticipate it could take until 11 a.m. to properly install the tubes.

Market House, which features several restaurants, will remain open during the drill.

Robert O. Schuetz, director of Central Services for Annapolis, said he anticipates the equipment will be used only in hurricane situations or other severe flooding, but are a sound investment for a city near the water.

He said the city spent \$70,000 on the flood walls.

"We live in a high-risk area right here on the water, and these old buildings are down very close to the water," Schuetz said. "If it happens that we save ourselves from one or two storms, then it was money well spent."

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