



STEAMSHIP MUTUAL Risk Alert



Mississippi - High River Season



This Risk Alert has been written by Captain Ken Robson, Loss Prevention Manager

The Mississippi High River Season occurs every year usually from early March until the middle of May although in some circumstances it can extend into early June. The extent of the higher water levels – and the severity of the consequences - largely depends on the melting of winter snows in the Rocky Mountains and the Appalachians, and on spring rains across the US Midwest and South.

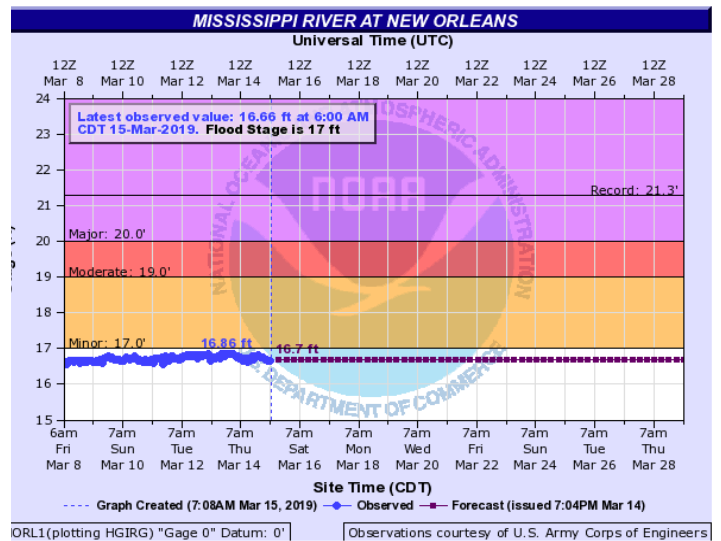
The Mississippi River's height is measured at the New Orleans Carrollton Gauge (29° 55' 56"N, 90° 08' 08"W) and is considered to be 'high' when it measures 8 feet and rising at the gauge. For comparison, the river is considered to be 'normal' when between 5 feet and 8 feet at the gauge and 'low' when between 2 feet and 5 feet. Coupled with an increased river height is the increased river current which can reach as much as 4 - 6 knots, but possibly up to 7 knots in the river bends. The water turbulence created by the increased current can also alter the shoaling.

Information provided by the United States Coastguard in their "Vessel Traffic Service Lower Mississippi River User Manual" highlight special requirements that come into effect when the river is 'high' at the Carrollton Gauge. For instance, VTS operators regulate the movement of all tugs with tows and all ships within the Algiers Special Area. Algiers Point will normally be restricted to one way traffic during high water periods; exceptions will be granted only by the VTS.



Vessel movement control is accomplished through radio communications between the VTS and vessels and by the use of red/green vessel traffic control lights. If necessary, Captain of the Port (COTP) orders may be issued. Routine operations resume when the Carrollton Gauge reads 9 feet with an expectation that it will continue to fall. Operationally, a 'high' river status has been shown to be the cause of a number of problems:

- Anchor loss and possible windlass breakdown problems during recovery because of excessive load.
- Difficulty in keeping vessels alongside berths, particularly those that are deeply laden at berths close downstream from bends, as the river flows between the vessel and the berth. In these circumstances it may be necessary to engage tugs to constantly push the vessel alongside.
- Potentially more serious consequences if a vessel suffers a loss of steering or propulsion.



The Club recommends that Masters of vessels bound for the Mississippi River in the coming weeks should take the river height into account both when planning their passage up/down river, if at anchor in the river, or while alongside a berth.

In 2019 the river height at the Carrollton Gauge reached 16 feet on 27 February and the latest forecast is for it to remain 'high' until about mid-April 2019. It is predicted to crest at 17 feet between 13 to 23 March 2019.

Recent and short term forecasted river levels can be accessed [here](#). Alternatively longer term forecast are available [here](#).

Risk Alert support available @ [Loss Prevention Department](#).