



Mississippi floods, 1993, Farm fields flooded.

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freight and the Mississippi and its tributaries are the major route for this traffic. The river above Saint-Louis was closed to barges for two months, delaying millions of tons of coal, grain and fertilizer. Bridges destroyed by the flood required diversion of road and rail traffic.

At least 75 towns were completely inundated and some may never be rebuilt; others are planned to be rebuilt on higher ground nearby. Initial estimates of the economic impact indicate total losses of US\$ 15-20 billion. Fortunately the death toll was small; less than 50 deaths were attributed to the flood.

The flood plains in the Mississippi are protected by dykes, some built privately and others by federal agencies, usually the United States Army Corps of Engineers. About 80 per cent of privately constructed dykes failed during the flood, but the federal dykes, built to withstand at least the 100-year flood, mostly held. In the wake of the flood there was renewed discussion of the wisdom of using dykes to protect farmland on the flood plain. A more natural, unprotected flood plain would absorb the flood better, leading to lower flood peak levels. This would also require removing many existing buildings and even whole towns off the flood plain.