

# Ice boom removal to start today after latest flyover

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A New York Power Authority crew plans to begin removing the ice boom today.

A flyover Monday showed that ice cover on eastern Lake Erie had been reduced to about 90 square miles -- well under the 250-square-mile mark needed to open the boom, the International Niagara Board of Control announced.

The removal of the boom had been delayed since the beginning of the month because more than 250 square miles of ice cover remained on the eastern end of the lake.

The 1.66-mile boom -- made up of steel pontoons linked together from Buffalo Harbor to near the Canadian shore -- is designed to keep ice chunks from damaging water intakes of hydroelectric power projects in the Niagara River.

A crew from the Power Authority is scheduled to begin work today to remove the 22 steel pontoon spans from the water using a barge and a tug boat, Power Authority spokeswoman Connie M. Cullen said.

As each pontoon is removed, Cullen said, it is attached to an ice breaker vessel and pulled to a breakwater on the U.S. side of the border.

After all the pontoons are attached to the breakwater, the crew will begin working to remove buoy barrels from the lake and to tow the pontoon spans to a storage site on Hamburg Street, Cullen said. The process takes about three days.

Paul Yu, of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Buffalo District, said representatives from the Power Authority, the International Niagara Board of Control and Environment

Canada made aerial observations of the ice Monday to determine the amount of ice that remained on the lake.

The agencies have been conducting the flights since late last month to monitor the condition of the ice. Last Wednesday, the ice measured 260 square miles, according to the International Niagara Board of Control, which oversees the boom.

Under international regulations, the boom must be opened by April 1 unless there is more than 250 square miles of ice on the eastern end of the lake.

Yu said ice floes already in the Niagara River prior to the opening of the boom were likely caused by heavy winds pushing ice over the boom Monday.

The boom, which is owned and operated by the Power Authority and Ontario Power Generation, was first installed during the winter of 1964 and 1965. The latest date it was removed was May 3, 1971.

In Niagara Falls, residents or visitors doing business at City Hall are invited to sign their names on a 5-foot diameter orange ball that will be part of the annual program celebrating the removal of the ice boom and the kickoff of the water recreation season in Western New York.

The ball can be signed from 1 p.m. today until 3 p.m. Wednesday at Niagara Falls City Hall, 745 Main St.

The signed "boom ball" will be dropped into the river from the deck of the Buffalo fireboat Edward M. Cotter at 6 p.m. Friday to float down the river and presumably over the cataracts at Niagara Falls on its way to Lake Ontario.

A ball has been dropped into the river in this fashion annually for several years, but its final resting place along the waterway has remained largely a mystery.

Boom Days will be celebrated from 6 to 10 p.m. Saturday at the LaSalle Yacht Club, 73 S. 68th St., Niagara Falls, with live music, refreshments and fireworks. The event is open to the public.

*News Niagara Reporter Richard E. Baldwin contributed to this report.*