



GRETCHEN WHITMER
GOVERNOR

STATE OF MICHIGAN
DEPARTMENT OF
ENVIRONMENT, GREAT LAKES, AND ENERGY
LANSING



AARON B. KEATLEY
ACTING DIRECTOR

July 6, 2023

VIA EMAIL

Dear Coastal Local Units of Government:

Subject: Removal of Sandbags Installed as Temporary Shore Protection During High Great Lakes Water Levels

This letter is to inform local government officials that the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE), Water Resources Division (WRD) will be taking action to identify property owners who installed sandbags on the Great Lakes shoreline and notify them that any remaining sandbags must be removed. EGLE authorized temporary installation of sandbags for emergency shoreline protection during a limited period beginning in 2019. That period is now expired as explained below.

In 2019, when Great Lakes water levels were rising to near-record highs and causing accelerated shoreline erosion, the WRD issued a Minor Project (MP) permit category authorizing temporary installation of sandbags for emergency shore protection. This MP permit category required removal of the temporary sandbags when the high Great Lakes levels have abated; that is, when water levels fell below the elevation of the Ordinary High-Water Mark (OHWM) for the relevant Great Lake or Lake St. Clair. The WRD also issued an exemption for sandbag installations meeting certain conditions in the critical dune areas under its policy WRD-008: Part 353 Activities not Constituting a Use. The exemption required removal of the sandbags when water levels fell below the elevation of the OHWM for the relevant Great Lake.

The water levels of Lake's Michigan, Huron, Erie, and St. Clair are now below the OHWM elevations for each of the lakes. WRD staff will be contacting property owners who installed sandbags on the Lake Michigan, Huron, Erie, and St. Clair shoreline to inform them that the sandbags must be removed, including property owners who installed the sandbags under permit and those who installed sandbags without EGLE authorization. Leaving sandbags in place may result in impacts to natural resources and recreation, including narrowing of the beach in front of the sandbags, litter from damaged or deteriorated sandbag fabric, and hazards to navigation from floating fabric.

If you have questions regarding this matter or you would like to discuss how local governments and EGLE can work together to protect the Great Lakes and their natural resources, please contact me at 269-716-4894; ChamberlinZ@Michigan.gov; or EGLE, P.O. Box 30458, Lansing, Michigan 48909-7958.

Sincerely,

Zach Chamberlin, Great Lakes Analyst
Field Operations Support Section
Water Resources Division