

Ripple Effect Water Minute #23 - The 100-Year Flood

The "100-year flood" is a term you may have heard quite often living in the Red River Basin. But the term is misleading because it leads people to believe that it happens only once every 100 years.

The truth is that an uncommonly big flood can happen any year. The term "100-year flood" is really a statistical designation; there is a 1-in-100 chance that a flood of a certain size will happen during any year. Perhaps a better term would be the "1-in-100 chance flood."

Next time you think about "the 100-year flood," think of it as having 99 white marbles and one black marble in a jar. You close your eyes and pull a marble out of the jar and you pick the black one. You put the marble back in the jar and next year you pull out another marble and it's the black one again.

Your one percent chance of getting that marble happened two years in a row—just like the 100-year flood has been known to do!

This Ripple Effect is brought to you by the Red River Basin Commission.