

National Dam Safety Awareness Day – Suggested Key Messages

This document contains key messages developed for use in National Dam Safety Awareness Day materials.

Suggested Key Messages for Dam Safety Awareness Day

- Dam Safety is a shared responsibility. You are encouraged to know your risk, know your role, know the benefits of dams and take action.
- Dams provide many benefits to Americans around the nation including bringing water, power, flood control, recreation, and economic opportunities to communities. However, there are risks associated with dams, especially if a failure occurs.
- Be aware of dams in your area. Contact your local dam safety official for more information.
- Purchasing flood insurance and having an emergency action plan in place for your family or business can save you money and potentially prevent loss of life. Know what to do when you have to evacuate in case of a dam emergency. FEMA recommends signing up for emergency notification services and weather alerts in your area.,
- Inform your friends and neighbors about the risk of dam failure.

Additional dam safety information available for use in materials:

Know Your Risk

- Dams can be useful flood reduction systems, but if they fail, flooding can be catastrophic.
- You may not be aware of smaller agricultural dams in your area that are now considered high hazard dams (a dam whose failure would cause loss of human life). As the number of buildings, businesses, and people increase near a dam, so can its classification if it was not built to support the current demand.
- Dams are critical infrastructure, but they also provide recreational opportunities for boaters, swimmers, fishers, etc. If you choose to go out on a waterway for recreational purposes, be sure and obey all posted signage and barriers in the area (i.e., flood warnings, restricted access signs, portage signs, etc.)
- According to the Association of State Dam Safety Officials Lessons Learned from Dam Incidents and Failures Database, during the past 40 years, there have been many more fatalities from accidents at dams than there



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have been deaths resulting from dam failures. Specifically, more than 400+ reported fatalities at dams versus 40 deaths from dam failures.

- There are more than 90,000 dams in the United States according to the 2019 update to the National Inventory of Dams. Approximately one-third of these pose a “high” or “significant” hazard to life and property if a failure occurs.
- The average age of dams in the National Inventory of Dams is more than 60 years. While this is not a reflection on hazard potential, the high average age means that the majority of dams will not have been built to current standards, let alone incorporate newer standards that improve their resilience and reduce the risk to downstream areas.
- To find out if you live in a dam breach inundation zone:
 - Contact your local emergency management agency (a simple Internet search will most likely locate the appropriate office).
 - Contact your State dam safety program (see the U.S. map at www.damsafety.org).

Know Your Role

- Know the dams in your area where you live and work.
- Dam owners should be aware of potential maintenance issues and report them to authorities immediately.
- Dam owners have the responsibility to maintain their dams and to have an emergency action plan, especially for high hazard dams, where loss of life could result should the dam fail.
- Dam owners should work with the federal or state regulator to comply with safety standards.

What is an Emergency Action Plan?

An Emergency Action Plan is a formal document that identifies potential emergency conditions at a dam and specifies actions to be followed to minimize loss of life and property damage.

Take Action

- Inform your friends and neighbors about the benefits and risks associated with dams.
- Know your evacuation routes.
- Sign-up for emergency notification services and weather alerts in your area.
- Maintain flood insurance if you live near or below a dam. Most homeowners and renter’s policies do not cover flood damage. Contact your insurance agent or company for more information about flood insurance.

- Purchase flood insurance and have an emergency action plan in place for your family or business should you need to evacuate quickly due to a dam failure upstream.

Know the Benefits of Dams

- Dams enable storage of water for drinking, hydroelectric generation, flood control, and recreation.
- Dams enable agriculture in drier regions and provide a more reliable water source for farmers.
- Dams can improve wildlife habitat and provide food for migrating birds.

Resources

- [American Society of Civil Engineers – 2021 Report Card for America’s Infrastructure for Dams](#)
- [Association of State Dam Safety Officials – Kids Activities & Links](#)
- [Association of State Dam Safety Officials – Technical Resources](#)
- [Association of State Dam Safety Officials – Dam Facts and Stats for the Media and Public](#)
- [Association of State Dam Safety Officials – National Dam Safety Awareness Day webpage](#)
- [FEMA National Dam Safety Program – Dam Safety Resources for the General Public](#)
- [FEMA National Dam Safety Program – Dam Safety Publications & Resources](#)
- [United States Society on Dams – Dam and Levee Education Resources](#)

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