



USACE Supports National Dam Safety Awareness Day

“Dams are an important part of our nation’s watersheds and to communities’ flood risk management. They provide enormous benefits to the nation: clean power, water supply, recreation and navigation. Our dam safety professionals work extremely hard every day to make sure these dams perform as intended.”

— James C. Dalton, Dam Safety Officer, HQ USACE

On May 31, 1889, the [South Fork Dam](#) in Johnstown, Pa., failed, making it our nation’s worst dam failure. More than 2,200 people died. Now every May 31, we observe [National Dam Safety Awareness Day](#), which encourages and promotes individual and community awareness and responsibility, and best practices for dam safety. An additional goal is to raise awareness of the benefits dams offer to communities. Dam safety is the dam owner’s responsibility. The consequences, however, are shared by many, which leads to the need for increased awareness about dam safety.

Dam safety has been a major goal since the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers began building dams in the 1840s. USACE delivers safe dam operation and performance through continuous assessment, communication and risk management by [dam safety](#) professionals at all levels within USACE. Our dam safety investment plan prioritizes funds in a resource-constrained environment through an understanding of the respective project’s potential risks and the benefits it provides.

USACE operates and maintains more than 700 dams, which are part of our nation’s landscape and essential to the economic and social productivity of our communities and the nation. Dams provide enormous benefits to our country—contributing to \$13.4 billion in flood damages prevented in 2013, or \$8 of damages avoided for each \$1 invested. In addition, USACE dams provide clean water for residential, business and agricultural use. USACE is also the largest provider of zero-emission hydropower in the U.S. USACE dams provide efficient transportation for moving large exports of corn, wheat, and soy from U.S. farmers to the world and contribute to more than 370 million visits annually at 403 lake and river projects. These visitors contribute \$18 billion to local economies and support 270,000 jobs annually.

USACE is proud of its accomplishments and dam safety record of no catastrophic dam failures. National Dam Safety Awareness Day provides the opportunity to consider how each of us and our communities can recognize the importance of risk awareness, knowing and understanding the [risks and benefits](#) associated with dams, and take action to help reduce risk from living near a dam.

Key Messages

- Dam failures are a rare event in the US. Risks remain and the consequences of dam failure can be massive in lives lost, economic and environmental damages.
- Living with dams is a shared responsibility and requires constant assessment, communication, engagement and management.
- Know your risk: contact your local emergency management agency or state dam safety official.
- Know your role: have an emergency preparedness plan for you and your family; and practice it.
- Take action: know your evacuation route; talk to neighbors; purchase flood insurance.

Facts & Figures

- There are more than 87,000 dams in the United States, of which only 4 percent are owned by the federal government.
- USACE operates and maintains:
 - More than 700 dams.
 - Six of the ten largest reservoirs in the U.S.
 - Seven of the ten largest embankment dams in the U.S.
 - 50 percent of all federally-owned dams
- One out of every four megawatts of hydropower production in the U.S. is generated by USACE.
- Average age of USACE dams is 56 years.
- For more information on USACE’s dam safety mission, visit <http://www.usace.army.mil/>.