

FEMA Region 3 Highlights Dam Safety on Anniversary of the Historic Johnstown Dam Failure

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PHILADELPHIA- National Dam Safety Awareness Day occurs on May 31 of each year in remembrance of the devastating failure of the South Fork Dam in Johnstown, Pennsylvania in 1889. The dam failure resulted in the loss of more than 2,200 lives and was the worst dam failure in the history of the United States.

National Dam Safety Awareness Day was created to encourage and promote individual and community responsibility for dam safety, as well as to provide information on what steps can be taken to prevent future structural dam failures. A secondary goal is to promote the benefits dams offer to communities.

In FEMA Region 3, there are nearly 5,300 dams in Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia and West Virginia.

For over 30 years, the federal government has been working to protect communities from dam failure through FEMA's National Dam Safety Program (NDSP) State Assistance Grant Program. The program is a partnership of states, federal agencies, and other partners to encourage individual and community responsibility for dam safety. The program provides funding for dam safety training, while also enhancing dam inspection requirements.

Additionally, FEMA provides funding for technical planning, design, and construction assistance for rehabilitation of eligible high hazard potential dams through the High Hazard Potential Dams (HHPD) Grant. FEMA also offers Collaborative Technical Assistance (CTA) to help communities with dams better understand their risk and the consequences of dam-related emergencies.

While dams provide many benefits to communities, such as the storage of drinking water and the improvement of wildlife habitats, they can also pose a significant flood risk if they fail. Dam safety is a shared responsibility, and everyone is



encouraged to know their risk (and benefits), know their role, and take action.

Be Prepared:

- Know Your Risk: The United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) has a [National Dam Inventory](#) where you can search your area to see if you live near a dam.
- Sign up for local alerts and warnings, and enable wireless emergency alerts on your phone, so you are notified of an imminent dam failure.
- Have a go-kit ready with supplies that you can grab quickly if you are asked to evacuate.
- Know your evacuation route. This information can be found through your local and county emergency management office.
- Have a family communications plan ready should your family ever become separated while evacuating.

If a Dam Fails:

- Evacuate as soon as possible.
- Don't attempt to drive or walk through rushing water.
- If you cannot evacuate, get to the highest part of your home, and call 911 for help.

Additional information on national dam safety is available at:

<https://www.fema.gov/emergency-managers/risk-management/dam-safety/resources-general-public>

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FEMA's mission is helping people before, during, and after disasters. FEMA Region 3's jurisdiction includes Delaware, the District of Columbia, Maryland, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and West Virginia.

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