

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

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**Philadelphia, Pa.-** 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. It was the worst dam failure in the history of the United States and resulted in the loss of more than 2,200 lives.

The National Dam Safety Program (NDSP), authorized by Congress in 1996, is a national program that targets the improvement of dams and the safety of those who live in surrounding communities. 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. Across the U.S., there are over 90,000 dams that provide water, power, flood control, recreation, and economic opportunities for local communities. Dams play a vital role in the Nation's overall infrastructure and it is critical that they remain resilient in the face of emergencies such as natural hazards or man-made threats.

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



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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, 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 become separated while evacuating.
- Be vigilant about potential risks, especially in the event of dam failure; some smaller dams are now considered high hazard due to increased development.

### **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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