



News Release

(HOLDREGE, Neb.) – National Dam Safety Awareness Day occurs on May 31 of each year to commemorate the failure of the South Fork Dam in Johnstown, Penn., in 1889. The dam failure resulted in the loss of more than 2,200 lives and is the worst dam failure in terms of fatalities 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 steps that can be taken to prevent future catastrophic dam failures. A secondary goal is to promote the benefits dams provide to communities.

For 30 years, the federal government has been working to protect Americans from dam failure through the National Dam Safety Program (NDSP). The NDSP, which is led by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), is a partnership of the states, federal agencies, and other stakeholders to encourage individual and community responsibility for dam safety.

The Central Nebraska Public Power and Irrigation District owns and operates several dams in Nebraska, including the state's largest, Kingsley Dam, at Lake McConaughy. The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) requires Central to update and revise its emergency action plans (EAP) annually and distribute the revised plan to a designated list of local, state and federal entities.

While Kingsley Dam is the primary focus of Central's dam safety efforts, Central also has prepared EAPs for dams impounding Jeffrey Lake and Johnson Lake.

EAPs contain information pertaining to how potential conditions that could cause or indicate an emergency situation should be addressed and steps to evaluate those conditions. Such conditions include inordinately high inflows, adverse weather conditions, and any situations discovered during routine inspections of the structures.

The purpose of the EAPs is to provide maximum early warning to all persons downstream of the dam involved in the unlikely event of a failure (catastrophic or otherwise) of the structure. In addition to providing early warning, Central's objective is to minimize or eliminate danger to people and property downstream. The EAPs contain contact information for dozens of agencies that will be notified in the event of an emergency and outlines their responsibilities and use of resources in response to a dam failure.

Central also conducts functional exercises of the EAPs every five years that involve representatives from the numerous agencies that would be involved. The exercise involves realistic notification and response procedures by each of the participants and provides a forum for an exchange of ideas and suggestions to improve the process. A functional exercise for Kingsley Dam is scheduled to take place at Central's Gothenburg Division headquarters on June 10.

It is emphasized that the probability of an emergency of the magnitude considered in the EAPs is extremely remote and it does not imply that Central has concerns over the integrity of the dams. The dams are inspected regularly by well-trained Central personnel, annually by FERC personnel, and at five-year intervals by independent engineering consultants.

While dams provide many benefits to communities, such as storage for irrigation water, generation of hydroelectric power, recreational opportunities and provision and enhancement of wildlife habitat, 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) and know their role.

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