

Authors

Gillian M. Gregory, Ph.D., P.E., GEI Consultants, Inc.

E-mail: ggregory@geiconsultants.com

William C. Salomaa, MA Dept. of Conservation and Recreation

E-mail: william.salomaa@state.ma.us

Matthew von Wahlde, Geonetics

E-mail: mvonwahlde@geonetics.com

DAMSAFE A New Program For Managing Dam Safety In Massachusetts

Following promulgation of new dam safety regulations in late 2005, the Office of Dam Safety in Massachusetts underwent a dramatic shift in focus. Prior to 2005, the office often conducted dam inspections for dam owners and frequently assisted with the costs of dam repairs via grants to owners. However, many significant and low hazard potential dams went uninspected for years. Since 2005, the onus has shifted to the dam owners to obtain and pay for their own inspections. In addition, dam owners are now required to register their dams with the Registry of Deeds, conduct their own repairs, and prepare Emergency Action Plans for high hazard potential dams. The Office of Dam Safety is now responsible for enforcing the new dam regulations, a process that can ultimately lead to fines and liens on property for non-compliant owners. The database used by dam safety office staff was never designed as an enforcement tool. In addition, decades of underfunding had led to a lack of confidence in the data in the database: many ownership records were in error, jurisdictional determinations were in doubt, and there were many errors and omissions in the basic statistical data for the nearly 3000 dams in the database. Serious flooding in Massachusetts in the Fall of 2005 and Spring of 2006 brought much needed attention to dam safety issues within the state and funding was appropriated to improve dam safety oversight. The funding allowed for development of a new data management tool (DAMSAFE). A first step in the development of the tool was to identify and standardize work processes for the various activities that staff is required to perform. All paper documents within the Office (over 40,000 documents) were scanned and tagged for retrieval within DAMSAFE. Basic statistical data, jurisdictional determinations, and ownership records have been updated. DAMSAFE has modules for dam registration, Phase I inspections, permits for dam construction or alterations, and EAPs. DAMSAFE includes e-mail notifications and ticklers to alert staff to upcoming activities and deadlines, allows for automatic generation of letters to owners, and includes a compliance enforcement and fines tracking module. DAMSAFE also includes a contact management tool, a report generator, and maps.