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State officials address need for security upgrades to dams

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Responding to the Federal Emergency Management Agency's recent announcement that it will provide \$225 million in grants to states to increase protection from acts of terrorism, the Association of State Dam Safety Officials is calling for states to earmark a portion of these grant funds for dam security upgrades. Meeting in national conference earlier this month, the 50 state dam safety program representatives passed a resolution (attached) that details the issue and the urgent need for security upgrades related to dams.

"Dams have repeatedly been the focus of terrorist threats," said incoming ASDSO President Doug Johnson (WA). "It is incumbent on federal, state and local emergency responders to recognize the need to include dams in the initiative to protect critical infrastructure across the country."

States currently shoulder the responsibility for regulating the safety of approximately 95% of the 78,000-plus dams in the U.S.

After 9/11, it became evident that many major dams in the U.S. were potential targets, and that water supply reservoirs behind many dams were the focus of potential contamination. Yet, this threat goes beyond high profile federal dams, such as Hoover and Grande Coulee, currently receiving national attention.

Of the 78,000 dams listed in the National Inventory of Dams, 10,000 are considered "high hazard potential" structures, meaning that their failure would likely result in loss of life and significant downstream property damage. Only nine percent of this total are regulated or owned by the federal government, leaving the responsibility for assuring the safety of the vast majority (roughly 70,000) of U.S. dams under the authority of the states.

Dams are a uniquely attractive target, as failures can cause enormous loss of life and damage to downstream property and infrastructure, and environmental damage to downstream ecosystems.

Further, residual effects of dam failures can be loss of water supply, power, flood control, navigation or recreation, all having long-lasting social, economic and public health impacts.

ASDSO recommends that grant funds should be earmarked for the following objectives:

- Updating and testing emergency action plans at dams
- Updating dam failure inundation areas maps
- Training dam safety officials and owners on dam security issues
- Conducting vulnerability assessments of the state's most critical dams
- Improving physical security systems around the state's most critical dams

Effects of failures are mitigated by having up-to-date Emergency Action Plans (EAPs) at dams. EAPs are an essential tool for first responders - similar to equipment such as HAZMAT suits, radios and emergency vehicles. EAPs chronicle the area below the dam that would be flooded from a failure, establish the communication between the dam owner and emergency response personnel, provide for notification and evacuations conducted by fire and rescue teams and predict the timing of the dambreak floodwave. Currently, many of the nation's high-hazard-potential dams do not have EAPs.

A dambreak analysis pinpoints areas affected by dam failure. Up-to-date analyses are essential for timely and effective response and recovery.

Engineers, dam owners, regulators and emergency management personnel have been thrust into the role of dam security experts, an unfamiliar discipline for most. It is important that all dam safety officials become trained to understand the security issue as it affects dams.

ASDSO advocates establishment of a vulnerability survey system to determine those dams that might be the most attractive targets. Specific vulnerabilities of those dams could be identified and mitigated, with improvements to security systems, EAPs, flood inundation maps and other initiatives that will make the dam less vulnerable to attack.

[END]

<Resolution 1-2002 attached>

The Association of State Dam Safety Officials is a national, not-for-profit organization made up of over 2,000 dam safety officials from federal, state and local governments, the private sector, and academia. The goal of ASDSO is to improve dam safety and state dam safety programs in the U.S.