

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

Contact: Sarah Mayfield Phone 859 257 5140 Fax 859 323 1958	450 Old Vine St. Lexington, KY 40507 Email: info@damsafety.org	<b>ASDSO</b> www.damsafety.org
---	---	-----------------------------------

**Failing Dam’s Condition Worsens as Township Seeks Funding Assistance**

Lexington, KY: April 20, 2004

The plight of Stanton Township, a small community in Houghton County, Michigan, is all too familiar.

The Michigan Department of Environmental Quality has ordered the township to remove, replace, or repair the Redridge timber crib dam. Cost estimates range from \$300,000 to \$1 million. The township, which has an Annual General Fund budget of \$160,000 and takes in only about \$95,000 per year in taxes, cannot afford any of the options.

The Township expects little help from the state—Michigan, along with most other states, is experiencing a state budget shortfall—and has launched various efforts to raise money to fix the dam. These efforts, however, have fallen short, and the dam’s condition has deteriorated further since 2001, when the State DEQ first issued the order.

The 50-foot tall wooden dam poses an immediate threat to downstream property, including a county road, at least one house, and an historic 74-foot high steel dam located only a few yards downstream. Should the timber dam fail, the Redridge steel dam, one of only two such dams in the country, could also give way.

Even temporary emergency measures are costly. In late March, Stanton Township received two bids—of \$49,500 and \$144,250—for drawing down the level of the pool behind the timber crib dam. The Township has rejected both bids, and will reopen the bidding process.

The State has set a July deadline for short-term repairs to the dam. In the meantime, the community can only hope that the failing dam will hold.

Variations on this scenario are taking place in scores of communities throughout the country, and account, in part, for the American Society of Civil Engineers’ recent statement, in its *2003 Progress Report on America’s Infrastructure*, that the general condition of U.S. dams is worse today than reported in ASCE’s *2001 Report Card for America’s Infrastructure*. At that time, dams received a grade of ‘D.’

In response to concerns over deteriorating dams, the Association of State Dam Safety Officials recently compiled state and national estimates of the cost of dam rehabilitation. A nine-member task committee of ASDSO concluded that the cost of upgrading or repairing all U.S. non-federal dams in need of repairs would exceed \$36 billion.

For the past 20 years, ASDSO has worked to improve dam safety in the U.S. The Association has been instrumental in the passage of federal dam safety legislation and in the establishment and strengthening of state dam safety programs. However, ASDSO has long recognized that financial constraints on dam owners delay maintenance and prevent necessary repairs, increasing the probability of tragic dam failures.

Well over 50 percent of U.S. dams are privately owned; state and local governments, federal agencies, and utilities own the remainder. Most dam owners are not wealthy and even those who possess considerable financial resources are often overwhelmed with the staggering costs of dam repairs and upgrades.

The ASDSO task committee has recommended the creation of a national dam rehabilitation loan program. ASDSO has worked with lawmakers to draft legislation that provides funding for repairs to high-hazard-potential dams and is currently seeking a sponsor for the legislation.

The ASDSO report notes that many states cannot afford to wait for a national funding program; thus, it provides guidelines for establishing state revolving loan funds for dam rehabilitation, repair, and removal. Any future federal loan programs could then supplement these state funding mechanisms. Funding programs for dam repairs now exist in fewer than a dozen states, but ASDSO is working to improve this situation.

In November 2003, New Jersey voters approved a dam rehabilitation funding bill that provides \$15 million to pay for state projects and \$95 million in low-interest loans to private and municipal dam owners. John Moyle, Manager of the New Jersey Dam Safety and Flood Control Section, noted, "The funding mechanism is a win-win situation since it provides assistance to the owners, stimulates the economy by providing jobs, and protects our citizens from potential dam failures."

Many Michigan residents are well acquainted with the economic consequences of dam failure. The May 2003 failures of Silver Lake and Tourist Park dams resulted in more than \$100 million in damages.

The proactive use of public funds for the prevention of dam disasters would not only save lives—it would also be cost-effective. The dangerous combination of aging, neglected dams and rapid downstream population growth is a recipe for disaster. Without strong state support for dam safety programs and a reliable source of funding for dam repairs, more dam failures, with greater human and economic consequences, are inevitable.

ASDSO urges Michigan lawmakers to take a proactive approach to dam safety by providing strong support to Michigan's dam safety program and creating a loan program to assist dam owners who cannot afford the high cost of dam repairs. These steps would help protect the welfare of downstream populations, ensure the continuation of economic and life-sustaining benefits provided by dams, and guard the integrity of the surrounding environment.

---

---

*The Association of State Dam Safety Officials (ASDSO) is a national, non-profit organization founded in 1984 and dedicated to improving dam safety through research, education and communication. For more information: [www.damsafety.org](http://www.damsafety.org).*