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Engineers Agree: Proposed Legislation Will Save Lives and Protect Property

Lexington, KY—During the last week of March, leaders of the Association of State Dam Safety Officials (ASDSO) joined with several hundred members of the American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE) to support a common goal: protecting human lives.

Engineers from both organizations visited lawmakers on Capitol Hill to express their support for two bills that could significantly impact our nation's future disaster statistics.

On, March 16, Representatives Randy Kuhl (R-NY), Jim Matheson (D-UT) and Neil Abercrombie (D-HI) introduced legislation to reauthorize the National Dam Safety Program. The Dam Safety Act of 2006 (H.R. 4981) would provide up to \$12.7 million a year for four years to assist states in improving their dam safety programs.

Also on March 16, Senators Daniel Akaka (D-HI) and Daniel Inouye (D-HI) introduced the Dam Rehabilitation and Repair Act of 2006 (S. 2444), which would provide up to \$350 million over four years to repair and upgrade the estimated 2,600 unsafe dams in the United States.

The common date was no coincidence. Both pieces of legislation were introduced two days after a dam failure in Hawaii claimed seven lives.

While the Dam Safety Act of 2006 would reauthorize an existing program aimed directly at state programs, the Dam Rehabilitation and Repair Act of 2006 is focused on public entities that own dams, such as municipalities and water districts. It was originally introduced by Rep. Sue Kelly (R-NY) as the Dam Rehabilitation and Repair Act of 2004 (H.R. 5190), and again in 2005 (H.R. 1105).

The Association of State Dam Safety Officials endorses both bills, and urges members of Congress to quickly pass the legislation before another disaster occurs.

How likely is this? According to the experts, it's practically a given.

State dam safety officials have identified more than 3,500 unsafe or deficient dams nationwide, and many dam owners lack the funds required to bring the structures into compliance with state regulations.

It is no wonder that in 2005, ASCE's Report Card for America's Infrastructure graded the overall condition of our nation's dams as a D. That grade was earned in the same way all grades are earned: through attention, interest, and effort, and/or lack thereof.

Both ASDSO and ASCE agree that it is high time the nation gets serious about applying rigorous attention, interest, and effort to improving the condition of potentially dangerous dams throughout the U.S. Both urge Congress to act on H.R. 4981 during FY 2006, before the National Dam Safety Program expires, and to pass the Senate bill in order to expedite the remediation of deficient public dams.

According to ASDSO President Ken Smith, "We fully acknowledge states' rights, but the problem is so big that it merits federal attention. Dams are a vital piece of the national infrastructure, and the failure of one dam can affect several states. I'm afraid more lives will be lost without help from Washington."

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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.

Founded in 1852, the American Society of Civil Engineers represents more than 139,000 civil engineers worldwide and is America's oldest national engineering society. In March 2005, ASCE released its 2005 Report Card for America's Infrastructure, with grades in 15 categories. For more information, visit www.asce.org.

In 2004, both ASCE and ASDSO were founding members of the Dam Safety Coalition. The Coalition's goal is to educate Congress about the pressing need to rehabilitate our nation's aging dams. For more information, visit www.damsafetycoalition.org.