

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### **10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Mississippi Dam Failure Highlights Importance of Emergency Action Plans**

**Lexington, Ky.** – When the Big Bay Dam in Lamar County near Purvis, Miss., failed on Wednesday, March 12, 2004, it resulted in one of the largest releases of water due to a U.S. dam failure. Approximately 3.5 billion gallons of water over a quarter-mile-wide path traveled at least 17 miles downstream after what engineers determined to be internal erosion as a result of internal seepage.

Thankfully, no one was killed as a result of the failure. There was significant property damage, however, including the destruction of or damage to more than 100 homes, two churches, a fire station and a bridge. Dam safety experts attributed this outcome partially to the activation of the dam's emergency action plan. Upon activating the plan, local emergency officials conducted door-to-door evacuations and initiated a reverse call-back system to warn residents of the situation.

“Emergency action plans are valuable tools that can help save lives by putting important safety and evacuation procedures in place before an emergency occurs,” said Lori Spragens, executive director of the [Association of State Dam Safety Officials](http://www.asdso.org) (ASDSO). “Everyone has a role to play in creating a future where all dams are safe, and the anniversary of the Big Bay Dam failure reminds us of the importance of understanding the risks associated with potential dam incidents and failures.”

According to the Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality, Mississippi has 3,845 state-regulated dams, of which 269 are classified as high-hazard potential dams. The high-hazard potential classification indicates that a dam may cause loss of life if it were to fail. Of the state's 269 state-regulated, high-hazard potential dams, 229 have emergency action plans in place.

ASDSO encourages members of the public to educate themselves on both the benefits of dams and the risks of dam incidents and failures. Residents can determine if they live in a dam failure flood inundation zone by contacting their local emergency management agency or the state dam safety program. ASDSO recommends that people who live near dams familiarize themselves with evacuation routes, make sure all family members know what to do in the event of an emergency and prepare an emergency kit.

More information on staying safe near dams can be found in ASDSO's informational guide, [Living with Dams: Know Your Risks](#), which the organization developed in conjunction with the [Federal Emergency Management Agency](#).

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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. Web: [www.damsafety.org](http://www.damsafety.org)