

Governor Youngkin declares May 31 Dam Safety Awareness Day in Virginia

Know your risk, know your role, know the benefits of dams and take action

Richmond, Va. – Governor Glenn Youngkin has declared May 31 Dam Safety Awareness Day in Virginia to raise awareness of the dangers posed by improperly maintained dams and to promote shared responsibility between individuals and communities for dam safety.

Dam Safety Awareness Day is observed on May 31 each year to commemorate the failure of the South Fork Dam in Johnstown, Pennsylvania in 1889. The Johnstown disaster killed over 2,200 people and remains the worst dam-related disaster in the history of the United States. The flood was caused by a catastrophic failure of South Fork Dam brought on by days of heavy rain and a series of alterations that made the dam more vulnerable to overtopping.

Flooding, improper maintenance and aging infrastructure can all impact dam safety. The average age of Virginia's dams is 75 years old, according to the United States Army Corps of Engineers' National Inventory of Dams.

The Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation is responsible for and regulates more than 2,500 dams across the state, including 487 high hazard dams. High hazard dams are likely to cause loss of life or serious economic damage in the event of a failure. DCR's dam safety staff provide technical assistance to ensure dams are properly and safely designed, built, operated and maintained.

DCR encourages individuals and communities across the commonwealth to take these actions to increase awareness about dam safety:

Know your risk. Find out if you live in a dam-breach inundation zone and determine your flood risk by visiting the Virginia Flood Risk Information System (VFRIS), by contacting your local emergency management agency or DCR Dam Safety Program staff.

Know your role. Be aware of potential maintenance issues and report them to dam owners, DCR Dam Safety and local authorities immediately. Visible cracks and damage, seepage, overgrown vegetation and clogged spillways are all signs of neglect.

Take action. Maintain flood insurance if you live at or near a dam-break inundation zone. Have a plan in place for your family or business should you need to evacuate quickly because of a dam failure.

DCR is the agency to contact if you have concerns about a dam. You can reach DCR's Dam Safety Program staff at 804-371-6095 or by email at dam@dcr.virginia.gov.

To learn more, please visit DCR's Dam Safety Education page: <https://www.dcr.virginia.gov/dam-safety-and-floodplains/ds-education>.