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May 14 Marks 10th Anniversary of Silver Lake Dam Failure

Michigan Dams Still Require Rehabilitation after Nine-Billion-Gallon Flood Caused \$100 Million in Damage

Lexington, Ky. – Tuesday, May 14 marks the 10th anniversary of the 2003 failure of the Silver Lake Dam upstream of Marquette, Mich., which caused extensive flooding and property and environmental damages totaling more than \$100 million.

The Silver Lake Dam failure released nine billion gallons of water, causing the failure of the Tourist Park Dam downstream, and forcing bridge and road closures. These closures completely isolated the Big Bay community from the rest of the state and forced the evacuation of 1,800 residents from their homes.

“A decade after the Silver Lake Dam failure, we’re reminded that all Americans benefit from dams, so we need to understand the risks associated with potential failures and take the steps necessary to mitigate them,” said Lori Spragens, executive director of the [Association of State Dam Safety Officials](http://www.damsafety.org) (ASDSO). “Those risks include loss of human life and extensive damages to property, infrastructure and the environment.”

ASDSO works with dam owners and state and federal lawmakers to create strong dam safety programs. The non-profit group also works to raise awareness that all Americans benefit from dams and need to understand the risks associated with potential incidents and failures. Dams provide drinking water, hydroelectric or water power, flood control, irrigation, recreation and many other benefits to people and local economies. However, more than half of U.S. dams are more than 50 years old and many are not properly maintained. [According to ASDSO’s data](#), as of last year, the number of high-hazard-potential dams, or dams whose failure could cause the loss of human life, increased to more than 11,300, up from 9,281 in 1998. Embankment dams like the original Silver Lake Dam and its replacement, which was built in 2008, are the most common type of dam in use today.

Michigan alone has 1,019 state-regulated dams, with just three full-time employees in its dam safety program. As of 2012, 88 of these dams were high-hazard-potential structures.

State and federal policymakers can increase the safety of dams by providing strong laws and resources to carry out safety programs. ASDSO supports federal legislation that would provide funds to be cost-shared at 65 percent federal to 35 percent state and local funding for the rehabilitation or removal of non-federal publicly owned dams. The legislation would provide funds to states based on the number of high-hazard dams in each of the participating states.

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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