

Dams Sector Completes Comprehensive Series of Regional Resilience Exercises

The Pacific Northwest Economic Region, U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS), U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), and Pacific Northwest region stakeholders recently completed a yearlong collaborative effort involving focused on the Columbia River Basin. The 2009 Dams Sector Exercise Series – Columbia River Basin (DSES-09) was conducted to assist the Tri-Cities area of Washington State (Kennewick, Pasco, and Richland) in developing a regional strategy to improve disaster resilience and preparedness. The DSES-09 effort was based on multi-jurisdictional discussion-based activities involving a wide array of public and private stakeholders. This collaborative process was based on a particular scenario that served as a triggering event to analyze impacts, disruptions, critical interdependencies and stakeholder roles and responsibilities. The discussion-based process was executed under the framework provided by the Homeland Security Exercise and Evaluation Program (HSEEP). This framework provides a standardized methodology and terminology for activity design, development, and evaluation.

DSES-09 was specifically based on a severe rain-on-snow scenario that affected a large portion of the Columbia River Basin, leading to significant flooding along the river. The flooding event subsequently led to overtopping and breached levees in the Tri-Cities area, posing emergency management and public safety challenges, and impacting several other critical infrastructure assets, including those in transportation and energy.

This regional effort was conducted with a fairly unique approach. The overall effort was organized into five separate tracks focused on specific areas of interest, to include: 1) Modeling and mapping requirements; 2) Pre-disaster operational response; 3) State and local preparedness and emergency response; 4) Long-term restoration and economic resilience; and 5) Integrated regional strategy. These tracks covered the notional timeline of the scenario. Each track was conducted separately with completion scheduled to complement the other tracks as the overall effort progressed. The events associated with each track followed the HSEEP methodology, and included seminars, workshops, and tabletop exercises. More than 460 attendees representing over 90 organizations participated in all DSES-09 events.

The effort culminated with an After Action Conference in December 2009, which provided exercise participants with the opportunity to discuss and refine the draft After Action Report and Integrated Regional Strategy; it is expected that both documents will be disseminated by April 2010.

As a follow up to DSES-09, DHS and USACE are now collaborating with the Green River Valley area of Washington State to conduct DSES-10, which will assist in evaluating potential regional impacts and critical infrastructure interdependencies associated with significant flooding events along the Green River Valley. This initiative will ultimately improve public and private stakeholders' ability to identify, assess, and improve recovery strategies and business continuity plans, thus enhancing regional resilience and promoting robust partnerships at the local and regional levels.

For additional information regarding the interagency DSES efforts, please contact Yazmin Seda-Sanabria, Senior Program Manager, Critical Infrastructure Protection and Resilience Program, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Headquarters at Yazmin.Seda-Sanabria@usace.army.mil.