



Association of State Dam Safety Officials
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**Testimony of the
ASSOCIATION OF STATE DAM SAFETY OFFICIALS
Before The
Subcommittee on Water Resources and Environment
Of The
House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee
On The
Recommendation of the National Committee on Levee Safety
May 19, 2009**

Madame Chairwoman and Members of the Subcommittee:

The Association of State Dam Safety Officials (ASDSO) is pleased to provide this statement for the record for the hearing on the recommendations of the National Committee on Levee Safety.

ASDSO is a national non-profit organization of more than 2,800 state, federal and local dam safety professionals and private sector individuals dedicated to improving dam and levee safety through research, education and communications. We represent the dam safety programs of the states and our goal simply is to save lives, prevent damage to property and to maintain the benefits of dams and levees by preventing dam and levee failures. ASDSO has traditionally focused its attention on improving dam safety yet has broadened that focus to include levee safety. Levees are designed similarly to dams and act as flood control structures in much the same way as many dams. The practice of levee safety and the focus on the public safety aspect of levee safety is of vital importance to ASDSO and our members.

Dams and levees are a critical part of the nation's infrastructure. Dams provide vital benefits such as water supply, hydropower, irrigation and recreation and coupled with levees provide

flood reduction benefits to millions of people in the United States. Yet these dams and levees have the potential for failure and tragic consequences. As downstream development of levees and dams increases and levees and dams continue to age and deteriorate, they demand greater attention and investment to assure their safety.

The state dam safety programs regulate 86% percent of the 83,000 dams on the National Inventory of Dams. With the exception of Alabama, all states, plus Puerto Rico, have in place regulatory programs overseeing the safety of dams. About half of these same programs have the authority to regulate levee safety, but most are unable to effectively regulate levees due to lack of staffing and resources. Many states do not have laws on the books creating levee safety regulatory programs. The states and these programs look to Congress and the Federal government for their continuing leadership and support toward strong levee and dam safety programs.

The Association of State Dam Safety Officials respectfully requests that this Subcommittee recognize the enormous value of our nation’s levees and dams and the increasing concerns for public safety because of levees and dams. We request your support for the recommendations of the National Committee on Levee Safety (NCLS) including the establishment of a National Levee Safety Commission and for integrating the National Dam Safety Program into this commission.

The Future of a National Levee Safety Program

ASDSO agrees with the assessment of the National Committee on Levee Safety (NCLS) that “The current levee safety reality for the United States is stark— uncertainty in location, performance and condition of levees and a lack of oversight, technical standards, and effective communication of risks.” ASDSO further echoes the committee’s recommendation for “reasonable actions and investments in a National Levee Safety Program that turns the tide on risk growth,” and recognizes and supports the “need for a broader national flood risk management approach.”

The ASDSO Board of Directors recently voted to endorse the recommendations of the NCLS and the formation of a National Levee Safety Commission and agrees that there are significant benefits of integrating national dam safety and levee safety programs. Recognizing that levee safety and dam safety are critical to public safety and the environment, and that levees and dams share many aspects of design, construction, maintenance, hazard potential, emergency action planning and security, ASDSO respectfully suggests that dam safety and levee safety must be managed by one coordinated combined nation-wide program to be fully successful. As stated in the NCLS report, “Commonalities between levee safety and dam safety are many. In order to

maximize efficiencies at all levels of government, build upon existing state expertise and provide consistent messages related to multi-hazard risk to the public, all opportunities to integrate the two should be explored.” Many of the state dam safety programs represented by ASDSO also have regulatory responsibility for levee safety and we anticipate that many more will ultimately become crucial pieces of the levee safety partnership under the auspices of a National Levee Safety Program.

ASDSO strongly supports the formation of a National Levee Safety Commission. We believe the Commission should be modeled after other independent regulatory agencies in the Executive Branch. It should not be established within the Corps of Engineers, FEMA, or another federal department or agency.

The levee safety program should be expressly modeled on the successful elements of the National Dam Safety Program. That program requires the director of FEMA to prepare a strategic plan to establish goals, priorities, and target dates to improve dam safety and to ensure cooperation and coordination with state governments. The program also requires FEMA to provide assistance to states in establishing, maintaining, and improving dam safety programs. Additionally, the program requires FEMA to establish the National Dam Safety Review Board to monitor state implementation (authorized under current law), to monitor the safety of dams in the United States, and to advise the Director on national dam safety policy.

In order to establish an effective national program of levee safety and dam safety, the new agency should be granted similar regulatory oversight responsibilities over the nation’s federal and state dam safety framework as provided to assure levee safety. In other words, Congress should integrate the National Dam Safety Program, now administered by FEMA, within the proposed new commission, to be called the National Levee and Dam Safety Commission.

The Association stands ready to assist the Subcommittee and staff in any way to advance the cause of levee and dam safety. Toward that goal, please contact ASDSO Executive Director, Lori Spragens at 859-257-5140 if we can support the Subcommittee’s important work.

Respectfully submitted,

The Association of State Dam Safety Officials