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## **50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Deadly California Dam Failure Reminds Us to Be Prepared: Education and Preparation Key to Future Where All Dams Are Safe**

**LEXINGTON, Ky. - December 6, 2013** - On Saturday, Dec. 14, the City of Los Angeles will mark the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 1963 Baldwin Hills Reservoir dam failure when five people lost their lives. This tragedy marked the end of urban area earthen dams in California, and provided an important lesson for the public about dam safety and the value of having an emergency response plan in place should a dam fail.

Located in the Baldwin Hills area of Los Angeles, the dam failed just over four hours after it began to leak. The resulting flood emptied the reservoir, releasing 250 million gallons in 75 minutes, destroying or damaging 277 homes and apartment buildings. Thanks to urgent evacuation efforts, and nearly every resident following evacuation orders, the death toll was limited to five individuals. This could have been much worse if not for the prompt evacuation undertaken by the City of Los Angeles immediately after discovery of the leak.

The reservoir was not rebuilt. Subsequent analysis showed the site to be on top of an active earthquake fault line as well as unstable due to nearby oil operations that impacted soil conditions. The empty reservoir bed was partially filled in with dirt and subsequently became the Kenneth Hahn State Recreation Area that today enjoys great popularity.

“As an industry, we’ve made significant advancements in dam safety, from engineering and development through comprehensive evacuation planning,” said Lori Spragens, executive director of the [Association of State Dam Safety Officials](#) (ASDSO). “The anniversary of the Baldwin Hills dam failure reminds us that we must maintain and repair all dams while working to mitigate the consequences of dam failures and incidents. Through comprehensive planning, we can help protect all individuals living downstream from dams.”

As a non-profit organization, ASDSO works with state and federal regulators and lawmakers, and dam owners to create strong dam safety programs. All Americans benefit from dams, which provide drinking water, hydroelectric or water power, flood control, irrigation, recreation and other safety and economic benefits. As a result, all Americans need to be aware of the risks associated with potential dam incidents and failures.

Due in part to the lessons learned from devastating dam failures such as Baldwin Hills, the California dam safety program is strong. [According to ASDSO’s data](#), California has 1,248 state-regulated dams. More than half of these dams – 685 – are classified as high-hazard potential dams, meaning that the dam may cause loss of life if it were to fail. But a large percentage—about 85%—are rated in satisfactory condition by the state. California also has a funding program to assist dam owners with the repair or removal of dams.

Many states lack the same level of crucial resources and strong policies as California. Without strong state regulatory programs in place, the likelihood of dam failure can go up.

“ASDSO has useful information that people who live near dams can use to gain a better understanding of dams, including how to stay safe near them and prepare for an emergency,” added Spragens.

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](#). More information on the Baldwin Hills failure is available through ASDSO.

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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)