

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**125<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Dam Failure in Johnstown  
Highlights Importance of Emergency Preparedness**

*South Fork Dam failure remains the most devastating dam failure in U.S. history*

**Lexington, Ky.** – After 24 hours of rain, totaling as much as 10 inches in some areas, the South Fork Dam failed on the afternoon of May 31, 1889, releasing 20 million tons of water toward Johnstown, Pa. By the time the water subsided, more than 2,200 people were dead – one of the highest civilian death tolls on U.S. soil. To this day, the South Fork Dam failure remains the most devastating dam failure in U.S. history. Each year on May 31, the dam safety community commemorates this failure during National Dam Safety Awareness Day.

“As we mark the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the South Fork Dam failure, it’s important to remember that we all have a role to play in creating a future where all dams are safe,” said Lori Spragens, executive director of the [Association of State Dam Safety Officials](http://www.damsafety.org) (ASDSO). “Unfortunately, the potential for another tragic dam failure still exists and people who live downstream from dams need to take steps to ensure their safety before an emergency occurs.”

Dams provide important benefits, including drinking water, hydroelectric power, flood control, irrigation and recreation. With more than 87,000 dams in the United States today, nearly every American benefits from dams, but it’s also important that everyone understands the risks associated with potential incidents and failures. To help ensure the public’s safety, ASDSO encourages people who live near dams to 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.

While good planning and improved dam safety programs at all levels of government have dramatically reduced the loss of life resulting from dam failures in recent years, ongoing attention and investment are necessary to protect lives and property. State and federal policymakers can increase the safety of dams by providing strong laws and resources to carry out dam safety programs.

According to Pennsylvania’s Department of Environmental Protection, there are 3,369 state-regulated dams in the state, of which 769 are classified as high-hazard potential dams. This high-hazard potential classification indicates that a dam will likely cause loss of life if it were to fail. Pennsylvania has a low-interest loan program for public water supplies, flood control structure repairs and state-owned dams.

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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](#).

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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)

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