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Potential failure mode analysis (PFMA) and risk analysis procedures have evolved over the past two decades, in particular for internal erosion failure modes. Initially, internal erosion failure modes were commonly described based on typical pathways – internal erosion through the embankment, internal erosion through the foundation, internal erosion along the outlet conduit, etc. More recently, industry guidance documents have tried to re- focus the understanding of internal erosion failure modes according to their processes and mechanisms – backward erosion piping, concentrated leak erosion, suffusion, etc. Concurrently with this shift in focus to the different internal erosion mechanisms, over the past few years, the FERC and other organizations have required increasing detail in the descriptions of failure modes. This increased detail is needed to fully document the loading condition and mode of failure, from initiation to breach, to confidently categorize the failure more (for a PFMA) or estimate nodal probabilities for risk analysis. It has been the authors' experience, from a workshop at last year's ASDSO conference and from recent PFMA sessions, that there is confusion among practitioners on how to address pathways and mechanisms in describing internal erosion failure modes. In our opinion, the description needs to include both pathway and mechanism, as the two combined will define how the failure mode initiates and progresses, what considerations should be used to judge its likelihood, and where and how signs of the failure mode may be exhibited on the dam. This paper will explain the pathways and mechanisms and how they are combined to fully and accurately describe an internal erosion failure mode. Examples and appropriate references will be included. The reader will have a better appreciation of how pathways and mechanisms complement each other to fully define the initiation, progression and culmination of a failure mode. We propose this as a full 90 minute workshop session, with about an hour of presentations, followed by discussion with the audience. If conference scheduling does not allow the 90 minute session, this could be a standard paper and 30 minute presentation.