



Position Statement Investigation and Evaluation of Dam and Levee Incidents and Failures

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USSD encourages and supports prompt and independent, careful, thorough, objective, and thoughtful evaluation of significant incidents and failures related to dams and levees. USSD further encourages transparent and unbiased disclosure of the findings of independent incident and failure evaluations to the extent permitted by agency and owner policies and the law. Finally, for the educational development of current and future leaders within this community of practice, and the advancement of technology and professional best practices, USSD strongly encourages the examination and study of dam and levee incidents and failures as part of the lessons learned process.

Background on Issue and Statement Development

- USSD recognizes that dams and reservoirs are a critical component of our nation's infrastructure that provide significant benefits. Further, USSD recognizes that dams can potentially create risks to upstream and downstream communities, vital infrastructure and the environment.
- Levee systems provide protection to an extraordinary range of vital infrastructure throughout the country, but these same systems also create risks.
- Federal and State agencies, dam and levee owners, consultants and contractors across the US and around the world have made significant strides to improve the safety of dams and levees. However, significant incidents and failures continue to occur as a result of aging infrastructure, obsolete design/construction, increased loadings, inadequate operations and maintenance and inadequate risk management processes.
- Historically, incidents and failures have been a catalyst for significant evolution of design, construction and safety evaluation technology and processes. Incidents have also led to important and effective changes in legislation and regulations pertaining to dam and levee safety.
- Independent, careful, thorough, objective and thoughtful evaluation of significant dam and levee related incidents and failures are vital to establish improved maintenance practices, operational procedures and advancement of successful federal and state dam and levee safety programs. These assessments are critical to the continuing education and development of current and future dam and levee engineering leaders within the community of practice.

- Transparent and unbiased disclosure of the findings of independent incident and failure evaluations are an important legacy allowing broader industry participation in the lessons to be learned, integration of lessons to be learned into the community of practice and maintaining an awareness of the need to carefully manage risks associated with dams and levees. Such evaluations are essential to restore and maintain public trust and inform the rebuilding of the damaged and/or breached dam or levee.
- Lessons well learned reduce the risks of owners. Risk reductions can include lowering the costs of incident management as well as unplanned repairs and rehabilitation, and the negative perceptions within the insurance industry.
- Adequate documentation of incidents and failures is also a vital legacy for the community of practice, providing the basis of future research and technology and process development.