

Waterlines Express - News from DNR Division of Water

Indiana Department of Natural Resources sent this bulletin at 10/23/2024 09:15 AM EDT



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Dam Safety and Emergency Action Plans

Dam owners have a critical responsibility to maintain their dams and prepare for situations that could compromise their integrity. Emergency Action Plans (EAPs) are essential tools that help owners address immediate threats to dam safety. These plans, often called Incident and Emergency Action Plans (IEAPs), provide comprehensive guidance for responding to various situations – from gradual concerns like erosion and deteriorating components to urgent issues like water overtopping the dam. An effective IEAP outlines specific steps for evaluation and resolution, identifies areas that may be impacted by the loss of the dam, and compiles key resources and contacts for assistance.

IEAPs are valuable for managing both minor incidents and major emergencies. When owners address small problems promptly, they can prevent catastrophic failures, reduce repair costs, and minimize risks to downstream populations. Having an IEAP also facilitates coordination with local emergency officials, enabling them to make timely decisions about public notifications and evacuations when necessary.

Indiana state law (IC 14-27-7.5-18) requires owners of high hazard dams to prepare and update an EAP every six years. The minimum legal requirements specify that the plan must:

- Identify potential dam hazards
- Outline remedial actions to minimize downstream impacts
- Provide contact information for local emergency personnel

- Establish notification procedures for both impending and actual dam failures
- Include protocols for communicating when an emergency event concludes

While these requirements establish a baseline, responsible dam owners recognize the need for more comprehensive planning. The dam safety statute requires owners to exercise prudence in maintenance and safe operation. A robust IEAP that exceeds minimum standards ensures a more effective response to both deteriorating conditions and emergencies.

The Division of Water provides an IEAP template on its [website](#) with additional recommended components beyond the minimum requirements. These include:

- Inundation maps showing areas at risk during dam failure
- Detailed phone trees for various risk levels, with contact information updated annually
- Sections for tracking plan updates and maintaining a distribution list

Regular practice drills using theoretical scenarios help identify gaps in the IEAP's information or communication protocols. Dam owners should collaborate with their engineers to develop and maintain these plans. A well-designed IEAP enables efficient response to threats, ultimately protecting lives and property downstream of the dam.





A recent tabletop exercise and review of the IEAP for Proffitts Dam at Loomis Lake in Porter County.

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