

Why We Must Fix the Dam Problem in Massachusetts

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For Immediate Release

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BOSTON, MA: A privately owned dam off Pine Street in Canton breached on Monday, leading to the evacuation of an apartment building. Elsewhere, Waltham's Moody Street dam came close to failing yesterday. In the past few weeks, a state of emergency was declared in Freetown. The Office of Dam Safety is soliciting contractors for a controlled breach of the 200 year old Forge Pond Dam.



Failure of privately owned dam in Canton
Photo Credit Robert S. Stephens, PE

Today, the Boston Society of Civil Engineers Section/ASCE urged the legislature to act quickly and favorably on ***Senate Bill No. 427, An Act Relative to Dam Repair, Removal and Replacement, sponsored by Senator Marc R. Pacheco.***

BSCES President, Robert Stephens, PE, said, "The local climate appears to be changing based on the increase in rainfall frequency and intensity over the last fifteen years. Over the same period we've seen unprecedented development. These two factors have combined to cause increased flooding in New England. Neither our dams nor the public's commitment to dam safety have kept

pace. Dam safety officials toil to keep us safe, but they and dam owners often lack the resources to get it done."

In Massachusetts, approximately 1,700 of the 3,000 existing dams pose some level of risk to human life and/or property and more than 56% of all dams are privately owned. Individual dam owners are responsible for inspecting and maintaining their own dams, many of which are in poor or unsafe condition. Of the dams that pose a risk to human life and/or property, many do not have Emergency Action Plans in place should they fail. Many dam owners (public and private) lack the funds to perform evaluations, let alone the funds to pay for repairs/rehabilitation. While some owners have resources, they lack the incentive to perform evaluations and repairs as the penalty for not complying with current dam safety regulations is relatively minor in comparison to the cost of repairs. Current environmental regulations make it extremely difficult to remove obsolete or unsafe dams.

- Of the approximately 3,000 dams in Massachusetts, 43 are flood control dams, 44 are hydro-power dams and 164 are water supply dams. Most of the remaining dams are "run of the river" dams that were used to power mills during the Industrial Revolution and are no longer in use.
- A major disaster was averted in Taunton several years ago. Had the Whittenton Pond Dam failed, the possible loss of life and property damage would have been catastrophic.
- According to the American Society of Civil Engineers, 246 of Massachusetts' 1,630 regulated dams are in need of rehabilitation in order to meet state dam safety standards.

SB 427 will complement the efforts to regulate dams currently defined in 302 CMR 10.00 and provide the resources to address public safety by:

- Addressing the regulatory obstacles that prevent obsolete dams, especially those that pose a risk to public safety, from being removed.

- Implementing a \$20 million state revolving fund to assist with dam repair and/or removal.
- Increasing fines for non-compliance with 302 CMR 10.00: Dam Safety regulations.
- Requiring DCR to inventory dams annually and ensure Emergency Action Plans (EAP's) are in place for Significant (and High) Hazard dams.

BSCES urges the legislature to support *Senate Bill No. 427 - An Act Relative to Dam Repair, Removal and Replacement*.



Car trapped in the wake of failed Canton dam
Photo Credit Robert S. Stephens, PE

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