

DAM Safety

NEWS

A publication of SCDES's Bureau of Water

A MESSAGE FROM

John McCain, P.E. – *Manager Dams and Reservoirs Safety*

"The only thing that is constant in life is change." – Heraclitus, 5th Century B.C. Greek philosopher.

Since our last newsletter, there have been several important changes to the Dam Safety Program (DSP). On July 1, 2024, the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control was dissolved and replaced by two new agencies: the South Carolina Department of Public Health and the South Carolina Department of Environmental Services (SCDES). The DSP is now part of SCDES. While our name has changed, we are still the same team you've worked with over the years.

Change in Leadership

Change of Division Director for Dam Safety and Stormwater Permitting Division

Jill Stewart, P.E., has been a key part of the Dam Safety Program since the historic October 2015 floods. She played a vital role in rebuilding the program, first as the Dam Safety Section Manager and later as Director of the Dam Safety and Stormwater Permitting Division.

Jill *has not left the agency*, she has transitioned into a new role as Director of the Office of Permitting Support at SCDES. In this position, she will support all environmental permitting programs and will remain a valuable resource for the DSP.



John Poole, P.E., has been promoted to the Division Director

position previously held by Jill Stewart. He most recently served as the Section Manager for Stormwater Permitting and, prior to that, was an engineer in the DSP. John's experience and skillset make him exceptionally well-suited for this new leadership role.

"Dam safety isn't just about infrastructure—it's about protecting communities, ecosystems, and livelihoods," John said. "Throughout my career, I've witnessed firsthand the vital role dams play in stormwater management, water supply, and flood control. However, ensuring their integrity requires vigilance, technical expertise, and proactive regulation."

SCDES's commitment to dam safety is unwavering. Every inspection we conduct and every permit we issue contribute to preventing failures and mitigating risks. Our work isn't just



about regulating dams; it's about safeguarding lives. As we advance our efforts, collaboration remains key—educating stakeholders, refining our standards, and embracing innovation is required to address the challenges posed by the aging dams across South Carolina.

Change of Bureau Chief for Bureau of Water

Ann Clark has been promoted from Assistant Bureau Chief—where she oversaw multiple divisions within the Bureau of Water, including the DSP—to Chief of the Bureau of Water. Ann has been involved with the DSP since before the historic October 2015 floods and brings a deep understanding of the issues and challenges surrounding dams in South Carolina.



Ann has also served as incident commander during multiple hurricane events, leading the DSP's preparation and response efforts during widespread flooding.

"I feel very fortunate to have the opportunity to work with the DSP and regulated dam owners across the state," Ann said. "Over the past decade we have all made impressive strides to improve the safety of regulated dams with new resources and tools. I look forward to seeing what we can all achieve over the next ten years."

Promotion of Charles Owens in Greenville-Spartanburg Regional Office

Charles "Chuck" Owens has served as the regional dam safety engineering associate for the Greenville-Spartanburg office since 2016, overseeing dams in Greenville, Pickens, Spartanburg, Cherokee, and Union counties. (With the creation of our seventh regional dam safety office in Lancaster County, oversight of Cherokee and Union



(continued from page 1)

counties has since shifted to that office.)

Chuck is now stepping into the role of office manager for all environmental programs in the Greenville-Spartanburg office—a role that still includes dam safety oversight. A new regional dam safety representative will be hired to fill Chuck's previous position.

"Though I have accepted a new position, I will always be involved in some aspect with the dams program and will continue to provide the same level of customer service that is expected from our dam owners, so continue to call, text or email," Chuck said. "Once a new person is hired to fill my role, I may not be involved in some of the day-to-day activities, but long term, this will be a positive for the dam owners in the upstate, as there will be two experienced dam safety staff to support the dam owners with any questions or assistance they need."



Notices & Reminders

Renumbering State-regulated Dams for the National Inventory of Dams

To simplify records and communications, DSP staff have worked with the US Army Corp of Engineers (Corps) to unify how dams are listed in both state and federal databases. As part of this effort, new identification numbers have been assigned to all state-regulated dams. Previously, dams often had separate state and federal ID numbers. Now, each regulated dam will have a single, consistent identifier used across both systems. These changes are minimal—for example, a dam previously identified as "D5678" will now appear as "SCDO5678" in official SCDES records, correspondence, and in the National Inventory of Dams (NID), the federal database maintained by the Corps. Most of the older federal identification numbers, which differed significantly from the state numbers, will be retired. For questions or to confirm your dam's updated number, please contact the DSP at desresponse@des.sc.gov.

Preparing for Summer Storms/Hurricane Season

BEFORE THE STORM

As most dam owners know, June 1 marks the beginning of hurricane season in the Atlantic. In recent years, we've seen how tropical weather systems can significantly impact dams across South Carolina. However, it's not just tropical storms—severe thunderstorms can also pose serious risks, sometimes dropping 6–8 inches of rain in just a few hours. When extreme weather is in the forecast, dam owners should:

- » Perform a general inspection of the dam and evaluate the water level in the reservoir and determine if water levels can be safely lowered to make room for incoming flows.
- » Always coordinate with dam owners and/or property owners downstream before releasing water from a reservoir.
- » Review your Emergency Action Plan and update as needed.
- » Monitor the weather and rely only on official sources such as the National Weather Service.

DURING AND AFTER THE STORM

When the rain ends, dam owners should not assume that they've seen the worst impact to their dam. Flow into the reservoir can continue—or even increase—after the rain has ended, because dams collect runoff from a surrounding area known as a watershed. Some dams may have watersheds spanning several square miles, and rainfall anywhere in that watershed will eventually arrive at the dam. Therefore, during and after a rain event, dam owners should:

- » Routinely check and remove debris from spillways.
- » Keep alert. As the storm passes, watch for rising waters.
- » Be prepared to activate the Emergency Action Plan if it appears the dam may be at risk of failure.
- » Report any concerns to the SCDES DSP staff at 803-898-1939.

ReadyOp Emergency Notification

The DSP utilizes the ReadyOp Emergency Notification system to send scripted telephone calls (robocalls), text messages, and emails to owners and operators of regulated dams. ReadyOp is deployed in a targeted manner, with alerts sent to dam owners in counties that may be impacted by a specific weather event. Alerts to dam owners across the state are only sent under specific circumstances, such as when a hurricane with a large cone of uncertainty is approaching the state. Once a year, the DSP conducts a test alert to all owners of regulated dams. This year, the test took place on May 30, 2025. Did you hear from us? If you would like to register for ReadyOp system notifications, are unsure about your registration status, or wish to update your registration information, contact the DSP at 803-898-4050 or by emailing us at desresponse@des.sc.gov.

Electronic Distribution of the Dam Safety Newsletter

As noted in the 2024 newsletter, the DSP has transitioned to electronic distribution of the Dam Safety Newsletter, beginning with this issue. If you'd like to update or add a new email address, please contact us at desresponse@des.sc.gov. Current and past editions of the newsletter are also available on the DSP website at des.sc.gov/dams under the "Dam Owner Resources" section.



The Association of State Dam Safety Officials (ASDSO)

As a dam owner, you are legally responsible for maintaining your dam in a safe condition. If your dam fails and causes loss of life or property damage, you could be held liable. One of the most important aspects of dam safety is education. The Association of State Dam Safety Officials (ASDSO), of which SCDES is a member, offers valuable resources to support dam owners in the proper operation and maintenance of their dams. Please visit damsafety.org/dam-owners to access ASDSO guides, training, and other useful resources for dam owners. You can also explore [ASDSO's YouTube channel](#) for informative videos that educate dam owners and the public on dam safety.

NEWS & information

Change of Dam Ownership / Change in Contact Information

It is critically important that the DSP has accurate ownership and up-to-date contact information for all state-regulated dams. If you have recently sold your dam or changed your address, phone number, or e-mail address, please notify us so we can update our records. We are also happy to verify the contact information we currently have on file for you. You can reach the DSP at 803-898-4050 or by email at desresponse@des.sc.gov.

Dam Repair Assistance Grant Program

The General Assembly's FY2025 Appropriations Act includes Proviso 55.24 (SCDES: Dam Repair Assistance) which directs SCDES to establish a state-funded grant program. This program provides cost-sharing grants to assist with correcting deficiencies in High and Significant Hazard dams regulated under the Dams and Reservoir Safety Act. SCDES is currently accepting applications from eligible applicants for pre-construction and construction efforts associated with dam rehabilitations and removals for eligible High and Significant Hazard dams. The deadline to submit grant applications to SCDES is September 02, 2025.

THE DAM REPAIR ASSISTANCE GRANT PROGRAM AIMS TO:

- » Reduce or eliminate risk associated with dams
- » Improve accessibility of financial assistance to dam owners who may not be eligible to apply for other dam safety grants
- » Provide financial assistance for the rehabilitation or removal of High- and Significant-hazard dams that fail to meet minimum dam safety standards and pose an unacceptable risk to life and property.

Please visit des.sc.gov/dams for additional information about the grant and for instructions on how to apply.

General Assembly Proviso requiring 90-day Permitting Decisions

With passage of the State's FY2026 Appropriations Act, signed by the Gov. Henry McMaster on June 3, a new permitting requirement took effect July 1, 2025. The Act requires SCDES to issue a decision on a completed permit application no later than ninety (90) days after the date the application is received by the department. Prior to beginning the 90-day review period, the department may require a pre-application meeting with the applicant to establish review milestones.

The 90-day review period may be extended only by mutual written agreement between the department and the applicant. This agreement must be in writing and must specify a clear end date for the extension. The department may not stop, pause, or otherwise alter the review period without such written agreement from the applicant.

This will be implemented by the DSP in several ways:

1. We will be revising our standard permit application form, D-2602, to capture whether a permit application requires priority permitting (i.e., less than 90 days for a decision) or if standard priority is acceptable (i.e., applicant accepts a permit decision timeframe that may exceed 90 days). The application form will allow dam owner/applicant to indicate the time frame desired by which to receive a permit decision.
2. Pre-application meetings will be required for all proposed activities requiring a dam safety permit from SCDES. These meetings can be performed via virtual meeting or telephone conference, if desired, rather than an in-person meeting. A permit application will not be considered "complete" until the holding of a pre-application meeting with participation by the dam owner/applicant and the licensed professional engineer (P.E.) developing the permit application. The pre-application meeting serves the purpose of establishing early in the permitting process what elements of a permit application are required based on the dam's size, hazard potential classification, and type of work proposed, whether for new construction, repair, alteration or removal of a dam.
3. DSP staff strive to respond to permit applications with either a permit decision or review comments within 30 days of receipt of a complete permit application. If the SCDES's review comments haven't been responded to by 60 days into the permit application review, a reminder notice will be sent to dam owner/applicants with a 2-week deadline to respond. If neither a response to review comments nor the dam owner/applicant's agreement to extend the 90-day review timeframe is received by the deadline, the SCDES's decision will be denial of the permit application.

Have You Ever Considered Removing Your Dam?

If your dam is aging, costly to maintain, in need of expensive repairs, or no longer serving its original purpose, removal might be worth considering.

Removing a dam can reduce liability and eliminate the risks associated with dam failure. It also benefits local waterways by restoring natural flow, improving water quality, and reconnecting habitat for fish and other aquatic species. Support is available for dam owners interested in removal. Resources may include assistance with planning, permitting, project management, and even funding. In some cases, dam removal may qualify for wetlands mitigation credits through the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

To learn more, contact Chad Hoffman at American Rivers:

choffman@americanrivers.org

(706) 314-8214



Dam Ownership under the Dams and Reservoirs Safety Act and Regulations

WHAT DOES THE LAW SAY?

Section 49-11-120 of the SC Code of Laws defines an “Owner” of a dam as “those who own, control, operate, maintain, manage or propose to construct a dam or reservoir.” Dams can be co-owned by more than one party and even by a variety of entities. This can include but is not limited to homeowner associations (HOAs), limited-liability corporations (LLCs), private trusts, etc. Any person or entity who owns or is responsible for a piece of property containing just a portion of the dam or its appurtenant structures may also be considered a dam owner.

When evaluating ownership, the Dams and Reservoirs Safety Act Regulations direct DSP to first investigate those entities who hold title to the property on which the dam is constructed. Regulations also direct the Program to investigate if there are covenants or other legal agreements that have some bearing on the dam’s ownership.

WHAT DRIVES THE NEED FOR PROPERLY ASSIGNING DAM OWNERSHIP?

To effectively protect public safety, dam owners need to be clearly identified in SCDES records in order for the DSP staff to carry out its programmatic responsibilities.

HOW DOES THE PROGRAM DETERMINE DAM OWNERSHIP?

Because it is not a court of law, the DSP cannot make formal legal determinations regarding property ownership or boundary lines. However, DSP strives to use the best available data to determine who meets the legal and regulatory criteria to be considered a dam owner under South Carolina law. To make these determinations, DSP staff review SCDES records related to the dam—such as permit applications and construction documents—alongside other public records. These may include county GIS maps, property records from county tax and deed offices, and filings with the South Carolina Secretary of State for corporate entities. Based on this information, DSP makes informed staff determinations regarding dam ownership. For more information about how DSP determines ownership of state-regulated dams, contact us at 803-898-4050 or via email at desresponse@des.sc.gov.

Emergency Action Plans (EAPs)

The DSP is dedicated to serving South Carolina’s citizens by engaging daily with dam owners, nearby residents, emergency management professionals, and private consulting engineers. The DSP’s regional dam safety engineers (RDEs) perform routine inspections, provide maintenance and repair advice, and educate dam owners on their responsibilities under the Dams and Reservoirs Safety Act and Regulations. The DSP prioritizes close, first-name basis relationships between its staff and dam owners. As a result of these familiar relationships and candid conversations, the Program has been able to better understand the challenges these owners face and provide appropriate services to assist them. One such service provided is the drafting of Emergency Action Plans.

An Emergency Action Plan (EAP) is a formal document used to assist dam owners in identifying unusual or emergency conditions at the dam and providing a plan of action should an emergency situation arise. A current EAP is required for all high and significant hazard dams; however, any dam owner can benefit from having one. The EAP prescribes specific actions to reduce the potential for downstream loss of life and property damage in the event of a dam failure and provides guidance for identifying potentially hazardous conditions.

Upon request, DSP staff will draft a pre-populated EAP containing a dam breach inundation map, lists of potential downstream impacts, and an emergency notification plan. Dam owners that take it upon themselves to create their own EAP can utilize DSP staff expertise to review and help improve their EAPs and can request DSP-created dam breach inundation maps. Staff are always willing to meet with owners to discuss their EAPs at length, facilitate communication and collaboration with state and local emergency management professionals, and, upon request, organize tabletop exercises of EAPs to test their effectiveness.

DSP staff also work to ensure that state and local emergency management officials can access EAPs for state regulated dams to enhance preparedness and response to incidents of dam failure. Every year DSP staff reach out to each county’s Emergency Management staff to ensure they continue to have internet access to available EAPs for High and Significant hazard dams within that county. Dam owners should also know that under SCDES policy, EAPs are restricted from release under the Freedom of Information Act and only government officials that serve in an emergency management capacity are allowed access to these documents. If you’d like further information, the Dams and Reservoirs Safety Program can be reached at 803-898-4050 or via email at desresponse@des.sc.gov.

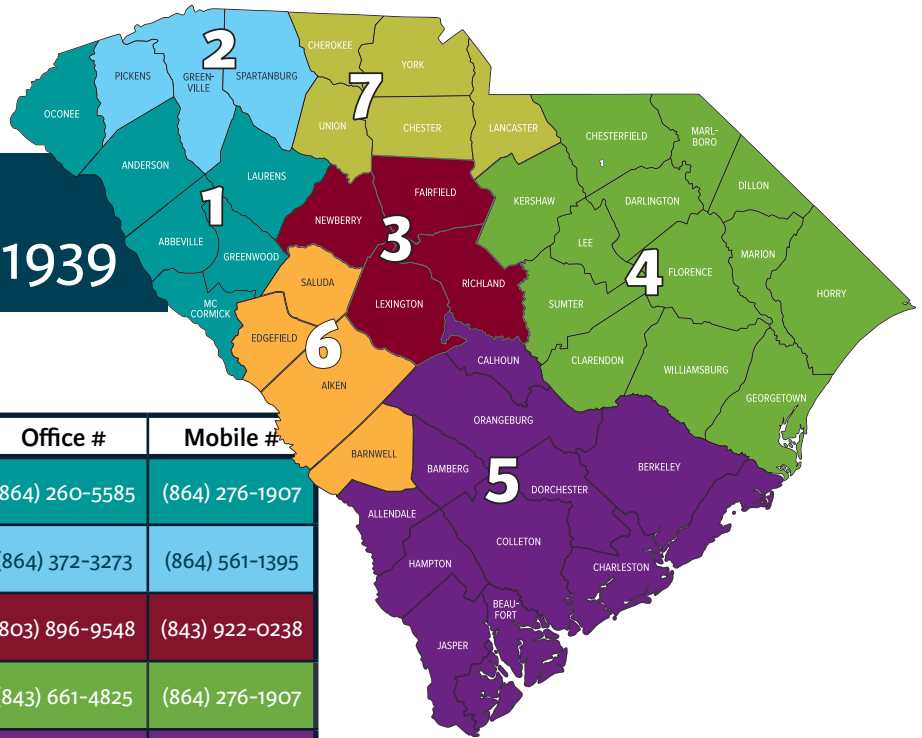


SC DEPARTMENT of
**ENVIRONMENTAL
SERVICES**

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We're On Call:
(803) 898-1939



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**Please Note: Our former Regional Dam Safety Representative in Area 4, Jared Woodard, has left the Department. Hannah Vinson will fill in for this Area until a replacement is hired. Chuck Owens has accepted a promotion but will fill in in his former position until a replacement is hired.*