



Update from Congressman NEIL ABERCROMBIE

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## Ka Loko Dam Failure March 12, 2006

Photos courtesy County of Kaua'i



Downstream damage



More downstream damage

March, 2006

### Dam Safety: A Quiet Crisis

Dear Friend:

Hawaii was shocked by the Ka Loko Dam tragedy on Kaua'i, with its loss of life, years of work destroyed and an entire community disrupted.

The state rallied quickly on behalf of our Kaua'i ohana. Search and rescue teams swung into action. Other responders lost no time in caring for survivors, restoring services and mitigating dangerous conditions.

Ka Loko focused public attention on a deeper question we seldom think about until tragedy strikes: What are our government officials doing to keep our communities safe from dam failures?

As a general rule, property owners are responsible for maintaining the safety of dams located on their land. State governments are responsible for the inspection of dams (except those owned by the Federal government) within their jurisdictions.

However, Congress has an important role in authorizing Federal assistance for dam safety. I have been pressing for Congress and the Federal government to take a more active role in this effort:



Ka Loko breach



Morita Dam

- Last November, I cosponsored the Dam Rehabilitation and Repair Act of 2005 ([H.R. 1105](#)), which authorizes \$350 million in Federal grants to states over a four-year period. The grants would cover up to 65 percent of the costs of repair, replacement, reconstruction or removal of unsafe dams.
- I am also cosponsoring another bill ([H.R. 4226](#)) focused specifically on small privately-owned dams like Ka Loko. It would authorize the Federal government to pay up to 65 percent of the cost of removal or repair of privately owned dams, with a \$5 million cap on Federal funds for any one project. The program would not cover dams used to generate power.
- In addition, I am a cosponsor of the Dam Safety Act of 2006 (H.R. 4981). This bill reauthorizes the National Dam Safety Program Act, a law enacted in 2002 but which is due to expire this year. H.R. 4981 gives a new lease on life to a small but important Federal agency, the National Dam Safety Program. It provides much needed assistance to state dam safety programs in the form of grants, training, research and dissemination of technical information.
- Also, I am asking for increased funds for the National Dam Safety Program. The Bush Administration has proposed \$5.9 million for the agency for fiscal year 2007. I have asked the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Homeland Security to increase the funding level to \$8.6 million, the full amount already authorized in law.

These actions are fully justified by the huge scope of the need. According to the Association of State Dam Safety Officials, state governments oversee 92,231 dams nationwide (134 in Hawaii). More than 10,000 are rated as “High Hazard” (77 in Hawaii). Ka Loko showed us what can happen when just one of those dams fails.

The American Society of Civil Engineers stated in its 2005 *Report Card for America’s Infrastructure*: “Like all man-made structures, dams deteriorate. Deferred maintenance accelerates deterioration and causes dams to be more susceptible to failure. As with other critical infrastructure, a significant investment is

essential to maintain the benefits and assure the safety that society demands.”

“Out of sight, out of mind” is a recipe for disaster. The tragedy on Kaua’i underlines the terrifying consequences of ignoring dam safety. Dam failures make the national news, but the root problem is the unseen deterioration that occurs over decades without being repaired. We must do everything we can to prevent the kind of catastrophe that occurred at Ka Loko. You can count on my continuing efforts keep the attention of Congress focused on this important issue.

Sincerely,



Neil Abercrombie  
Member of Congress

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