



The mission of the Clarks Creek Watershed Preservation Association (CCWPA) is to preserve, protect and enhance the environmental integrity of Clarks Creek, and to advocate the conservation and sustainability of its natural resources while promoting restoration and safety within the watershed.

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February 18, 2013

To:
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Bob Rusbatch, Middle Paxton Township EMA
Steve Libhart, Dauphin County EMA
Brett Zankel, esq. CCWPA
Alicia Reigel-Kanth, Middle Paxton Township Zoning Officer

Dear Mr. Libhart:

As a follow up to our meeting held on September 6, 2012 to discuss our organization's concerns about the Dehart Dam Emergency Action Plan (EAP), I am sending this letter to keep all parties informed as we, the Clarks Creek Watershed Preservation Association (CCWPA) move forward in the interests of our membership.

As you may recall, we had a very good meeting, and I appreciate both your time and also your thoughts and opinions regarding the issues brought to the table: basically our three concerns with the EAP.

OUR CONCERNS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Concern #1

Individuals are not aware that they are living in the inundation area which will be affected by a failure of the Dehart dam.

Discussion of the problem:

While the EAP does include an 8 page map of the inundation area should the Dehart dam fail, the individuals residing in the structures within the inundation area are not subject to notification that they reside within this zone until such

catastrophe occurs. We feel that it is the public's right to know that they reside in an inundation area so that they may take measures to prepare for evacuation if such an event were to occur. Due to the fact that we have had several floods here in Clarks Valley, and most people know how to prepare for storm floods, we feel that some may not realize that the inundation caused by a dam failure is much greater than the 100 year flood plain, or even the 500 year flood plain. Most residents of Clarks Valley have experienced 100 year floods and even 500 year floods as we have had several within the last 10 years alone. Most people here just "ride them out" with emergency provisions, battery power, and generators. Our concern is that an inundation caused by a dam failure would be confused by some as just another flood, which could cause more difficulty in getting people to evacuate, and place our first responders in greater danger too.

Recommendation:

Through a joint public awareness program, the Harrisburg Authority, the City of Harrisburg, Dauphin County, and Middle Paxton Township notify by address each of the households or businesses marked within the inundation zone.

Concern #2

Route 325 is listed as the evacuation route during a dam emergency.

Discussion of the problem

The EAP outlines actions to be taken under 2 scenarios during which a dam failure might occur: an extreme weather event, or a sunny day breach. It is clear to all of us living within Clarks Valley that route 325 would be impassable under the extreme weather scenario, since the road floods in several locations, and that it should not be listed as an evacuation route under severe weather conditions. The options are very limited for evacuation, since the flooded road would be impassable, most residents can only hope to seek higher ground until the waters recede.

Recommendation

The EAP should direct residents to seek higher ground immediately in the event of a dam failure during a severe weather event. Route 325 should not be listed as the evacuation route in a severe weather event.

Concern #3

Residents within the inundation area are not effectively warned of a dam failure requiring evacuation.

Discussion of the problem:

The EAP directs the notification of a dam emergency to proceed under specific criteria, and outlines the chain of notification, but the plan falls short of clear and urgent warning to the public in immediate danger from such a catastrophe. Given that during extreme weather events, residents of Clarks Valley experience power outages, and therefore may not be aware of warnings from electronic devices such as TV or radio, and given that many residents may not have a tv or radio on at the time of the warning, we feel that the use of a warning siren should be activated for the specific extreme danger notification. In this extreme situation, a siren could help catch the public's attention to be alert. At our meeting on 9/6/12, two different possibilities were mentioned: the reactivation of the fire siren at the ballfield in Dauphin, and the use of sirens retired by Three Mile Island.

Recommendation: We recommend that a siren system be in place to warn residents of this extreme emergency.

Again, I want to thank you all for your professional expertise and your time and concern for our safety. It is our belief that a dam failure is a very unlikely event, but since the EAP is to be updated this year (2013), we would like to make sure that we have the opportunity to make it a better, more realistic plan. We have all seen what terrible damage water can do, and while a catastrophic event is unlikely, we should still be prepared and ready to act. We feel that our recommendations will result in a better EAP, which may provide greater safety for both the residents of our watershed, and also the first responders who put their lives on the line to save others.

Sincerely,

Mary B Hochendoner
Clarks Creek Watershed Preservation Association

Copy: CCWPA Board of Directors