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PROPOSED LEGISLATION WOULD HELP PREVENT DEVASTATING DAM FAILURES
Civil Engineers Say Aging Condition of Dams Poses Threat to Public Health, Safety and Welfare

Washington, D.C.—State dam safety programs have identified more than 3,500 unsafe or deficient dams nationwide, many which are susceptible to failure as a result of flooding or earthquakes. And, as recent tragedies like the dam failures in Hawaii in March, in Missouri in December, and the near failure in Massachusetts last October, have shown us, an aging and under-funded dam's impact on a community can be tragic. In 2005, the American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE) published the *Report Card for America's Infrastructure* grading the overall condition of our nation's dams as a D.

As a result, ASCE strongly supports the bill introduced by Sen. Christopher "Kit" Bond (R-Mo.) and Sen. Daniel Akaka (D-Hawaii) to reauthorize the *National Dam Safety Act of 2006*. If enacted, this critical legislation will reauthorize the National Dam Safety Program, an important national program administered by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) that seeks to improve the safety and security of the nation's dams.

"Dams can provide a tremendous benefit to society, but a dam failure can result in severe loss of life, economic disaster and extensive environmental damage," said ASCE President Dennis R. Martenson, P.E., DEE, F.ASCE. "There is a dire need for federal leadership in dam safety, and reauthorization of the National Dam Safety Program is a crucial step in protecting public safety. We commend Senators Bond and Akaka for their leadership on this important issue."

"The National Dam Safety and Security Program is important to advancing dam safety in the United States and preventing loss of life and property damage from dam failures," said Senator Kit Bond. "Proper regulation, inspection and safety training is critical to maintaining our nation's dams. This legislation will provide much needed assistance to our underfunded state dam safety programs."

"The costs of failing to maintain dams properly are extremely high. There have been at least 29 dam failures in the United States during the past two years causing more than \$200 million in property damages and the loss of lives," said Sen. Daniel Akaka. "The National Dam Safety Program delivers vital federal resources to help state governments to improve their dam

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safety programs by providing funds for training, technical assistance, inspections, and research.”

Reauthorization of the program will allow FEMA to continue leading national safety efforts, including research, technology transfer, communication between state and federal agencies, and much needed training for state dam safety engineers. The grant assistance component of the act will also provide vital support for the improvement of state dam safety programs, which regulate 95 percent of the more than 78,000 dams in the United States.

Dams can provide many benefits including flood protection, drinking water, hydroelectric power, irrigation and recreation. However, without proper maintenance, dams can be hazardous structures. Failure or improper operation of dams can result in loss of human life, economic loss, lifeline disruption and environmental damage. In order to provide safe, continuous service, dams require ongoing maintenance, monitoring, frequent safety inspections and rehabilitation.

Reauthorization of this program will provide federal leadership and assistance to the state-level programs that shoulder the enormous burden of assuring the safety of our nation’s dams.

Founded in 1852, the American Society of Civil Engineers represents more than 139,000 civil engineers worldwide and is America’s oldest national engineering society. In March 2005, ASCE released its 2005 Report Card for America’s Infrastructure, with grades in 15 categories. For more information, visit www.asce.org.

In 2004, ASCE was a founding member of the Dam Safety Coalition. The Coalition’s goal is to educate Congress about the pressing need to rehabilitate our nation’s aging dams. For more information, visit www.damsafetycoalition.org.

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