

# DSOD Dam Rating List FAQ

## 1. Should the public be concerned if the dam in their community has an “Extremely High”, “High”, or “Significant” hazard potential rating?

No. The downstream hazard classification is based on the size of the reservoir and the potential for loss of life and property should the dam fail. A dam failure that may cause inundation of homes or critical infrastructure would get a high or extremely high rating, otherwise, it would be rated low or significant.

Hazard potential, however, is completely independent of the condition of a dam and its restriction status, and it says nothing about the likelihood of a dam failing.

## 2. Where can I find flood inundation maps related to dams?

Typically, local public agencies responsible for public safety, such as city or county office of emergency services, each have a copy of the flood inundation maps for the dam(s) for their communities. As required by new legislation, DWR will post “dam break” inundation maps online as they are approved.

## 3. Who is responsible for maintenance and repair of dams and their facilities?

The legal dam owners are responsible for operations, maintenance, and repair of their dams and appurtenances. Dam owners include federal, state and local public agencies, utilities, as well as private owners, or water and irrigation agencies.

## 4. Does DSOD have a process to consistently inspect and improve the condition of each State-owned dam?

All dams are regulated by DSOD equally regardless of the type of owner. The process is as follows:

- All dams are generally inspected once on a fiscal year basis, with some dams being inspected up to twice a year, such as Oroville Dam.
- When repairs are required as a result of an inspection, DSOD sends the dam owner a letter requesting the work be completed. If it's not completed in a reasonable timeframe, directives and orders to dam owners are issued.
- Existing dams are periodically reviewed and re-evaluated for changed loading conditions such as seismic and hydrologic.
- DSOD has performed special re-evaluation programs such as the radial gate inspection and evaluation program, the re-evaluation of dams

situated near high slip-rate faults, and the recently initiated spillway re-evaluation program.

**5. Should there be any concerns with the dams rated as “satisfactory”?**

A satisfactory condition assessment means there are currently no identified deficiencies with respect to dam safety. However, these dams need regular inspections, maintenance, and periodic re-evaluation studies to verify they are safe for continued use.

**6. Who has regulatory responsibility for dam safety?**

Legal dam owners are responsible for the safety of their dams. In California, dam safety regulators include DSOD, the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC), the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (USBR), and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE).

Federally-owned dams are regulated by at least one of these federal agencies: FERC, USBR, or USACE.

**7. Why are some of the dams listed as “not certified,” and how do they become certified?**

Non-certified dams are jurisdictional dams built without DSOD’s oversight and approval. Owners have three options to mitigate non-certified status: 1) remediate deficiencies to bring the dam into compliance; 2) alter the dam to less than jurisdictional size; or 3) remove the dam. The dam remains non-certified until the owner completes the chosen option under DSOD’s supervision.

**8. Does DSOD regulate dams owned by individuals or a private entity different than those owned by a public entity such as the state, county, city, district, or agency?**

DSOD regulates all dams in its jurisdiction in a similar manner as authorized and required by the California Water Code, regardless of whether an owner is private or public.

**9. Is there a relationship between the age of a dam and its condition?**

As presented in the data, there may not be a direct correlation with age and the condition assessment of the dam because many dams have either had repairs or major rehabilitations completed.

**10. Do dams have a finite design life and how would that be defined?**

A well-engineered and well-constructed dam does not have a design-life span, assuming it is maintained. However, that does not mean it won’t cease to function as intended. When deficiencies arise as a result of engineering

advances, the issues can often be mitigated through a repair or a retrofit. In rare instances, the deficiencies are so major that the dam may need to be replaced.