Does What Happens at a Dam, Stay at the Dam?; Public Safety Hazards and Consequences Related to Making Releases from Dams.

Steven Davidheiser, Gannett Fleming, Inc.

Paul Schweiger, P.E., Gannett Fleming, Inc.

Dams have become popular public destinations. There are also many potential public safety hazards at dams that are not well understood and mitigated. Hydraulic rollers and swift currents over spillways, and inflows and outflows from outlet works can create dangerous hydraulic conditions for people recreating near the dam. Intakes, buoys, trapped floating debris and appurtenant structures can create dangerous strainers. Spillway walls, chimney sections, outlet channels and steep slopes can pose slip, trip, and fall hazards to workers. A hazard not readily recognized is the impact that a sudden release can have on downstream visitors recreating in the or around the waterway. The purpose of this presentation is to discuss the public safety hazards associated with making releases from dams of all sizes, and the responsibilities and liability of dam owners and their operators related to making releases. The hazards discussed will be illustrated with several recent case studies, some involving fatalities and some requiring rescues. Strategies for safely making releases from dams will be presented.