Emergency Action Plans: There’s Always Room for Improvement!

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Emergency Action Plans (EAPs) are an important safeguard against the loss of life and property damage that can result from the failure of a dam. The National Dam Safety Program encourages the implementation of effective EAPs for high and significant hazard potential dams in the United States. Recent legislative and regulatory efforts by states and federal agencies alike have also taken aim at improving EAPs. Though these efforts have certainly enhanced the safety and regulation of dams, considerable opportunities for improvement remain. In preparing EAPs, it can be easy to lose sight of the difficulties that may arise during a real-world emergency. As a result, emergency plans often include redundant or superfluous information or are formatted in a way that is not conducive to use during an emergency. On the other hand, many EAPs do not include information or guidance that could prove useful to a dam owner in crisis. Based on lessons learned from the recent Oroville Dam evacuation and several EAP exercises and re-writes, this presentation will share simple but often overlooked ways for dam owners, engineers and regulators to improve EAPs for dams. By making our EAPs more functional and actionable, risk to the public can be decreased and lives can be saved.