



Ohio Department of Natural Resources

TED STRICKLAND, GOVERNOR

SEAN D. LOGAN, DIRECTOR

David Hanselmann • Chief

Division of Soil and Water Resources

Ohio Dam Safety Laws

Listed herein are Ohio Dam Safety Laws as contained in portions of Title XV, Chapter 1521. Of the Ohio Revised Code, requiring the ODNR, Division of Soil and Water Resources to issue permits for construction of dams and levees, and to make periodic inspections of existing dams and levees in the interest of protecting life, health, and property. Please note that existing Division of Soil and Water Resources Administrative Rules contained in Chapter 1501:21 of the Ohio Administrative Code remain in effect. The dam safety sections of Ohio law are as follows:

- Section 1521.06. Construction Permits for Dams and levees
- Section 1521.061. Surety Bond Requirements of Construction Permits.
- Section 1521.062. Periodic Inspection of Existing Dams and Levees.
- Section 1521.063 Annual Fees for Dams; actions against violators.
- Section 1521.064. Inspection Exemptions.
- Section 1521.07. Right of Entry.
- Section 1521.99. Penalties.

Section 1521.06. Construction permits for dams or levees. (A) No dam may be constructed for the purpose of storing, conserving, or retarding water, or for any other purpose, nor shall any levee be constructed for the purpose of diverting or retaining flood water, unless the person or governmental agency desiring the construction has a construction permit for the dam or levee issued by the chief of the division of soil and water resources.

A construction permit is not required under this section for:

- (1) A dam that is or will be less than ten feet in height and that has or will have a storage capacity of not more than fifty acre-feet at the elevation of the top of the dam, as determined by the chief. For the purposes of this section, the height of a dam shall be measured from the natural stream bed or lowest ground elevation at the downstream or outside limit of the dam to the elevation of the top of the dam.
- (2) A dam, regardless of height, that has or will have a storage capacity of not more than fifteen acre-feet at the elevation of the top of the dam, as determined by the chief;
- (3) A dam, regardless of storage capacity, that is or will be six feet or less in height, as determined by the chief;
- (4) A dam or levee that belongs to a class exempted by the chief;
- (5) The repair, maintenance, improvement, alteration, or removal of a dam or levee that is subject to section 1521.062 of the Revised Code, unless the construction constitutes an enlargement or reconstruction of the structure as determined by the chief;
- (6) A dam or impoundment constructed under Chapter 1513. of the Revised Code.

(B) Before a construction permit may be issued, three copies of the plans and specifications, including a detailed cost estimate, for the proposed construction, prepared by a registered professional engineer, together with the filing fee specified by this section and the bond or other security required by section 1521.061 of the Revised Code, shall be filed with the chief. The detailed estimate of the cost shall include all costs associated with the construction of the dam or levee, including supervision and inspection of the construction by a registered professional engineer. The filing fee shall be based on the detailed cost estimate for the proposed construction as filed with and approved by the chief, and shall be determined by the following schedule unless otherwise provided by rules adopted under this section:

- (1) For the first one hundred thousand dollars of estimated cost, a fee of four per cent;
- (2) For the next four hundred thousand dollars of estimated cost, a fee of three per cent;
- (3) For the next five hundred thousand dollars of estimated cost, a fee of two per cent;
- (4) For all costs in excess of one million dollars, a fee of one-half of one per cent.

In no case shall the filing fee be less than one thousand dollars or more than one hundred thousand dollars. If the actual cost exceeds the estimated cost by more than fifteen per cent, an additional filing fee shall be required equal to the fee determined by the preceding schedule less the original filing fee. All fees collected pursuant to this section, and all fines collected pursuant to section 1521.99 of the Revised Code, shall be deposited in the state treasury to the credit of the dam safety fund, which is hereby created. Expenditures from the fund shall be made by the chief for the purpose of administering this section and sections 1521.061 and 1521.062 of the Revised Code.

- (C) The chief shall, within thirty days from the date of the receipt of the application, fee, and bond or other security, issue or deny a construction permit for the construction or may issue a construction permit conditioned upon the making of such changes in the plans and specifications for the construction as the chief considers advisable if the chief determines that the construction of the proposed dam or levee, in accordance with the plans and specifications filed, would endanger life, health, or property.
- (D) The chief may deny a construction permit after finding that a dam or levee built in accordance with the plans and specifications would endanger life, health, or property, because of improper or inadequate design, or for such other reasons as the chief may determine.

In the event the chief denies a permit for the construction of the dam or levee, or issues a permit conditioned upon a making of changes in the plans or specifications for the construction, the chief shall state the reasons therefor and so notify, in writing, the person or governmental agency making the application for a permit. If the permit is denied, the chief shall return the bond or other security to the person or governmental agency making application for the permit.

The decision of the chief conditioning or denying a construction permit is subject to appeal as provided in Chapter 119. of the Revised Code. A dam or levee built substantially at variance from the plans and specifications upon which a construction permit was issued is in violation of this section. The chief may at any time inspect any dam or levee, or site upon which any dam or levee is to be constructed, in order to determine whether it complies with this section.

- (E) A registered professional engineer shall inspect the construction for which the permit was issued during all phases of construction and shall furnish to the chief such regular reports of the engineer's inspections as the chief may require. When the chief finds that construction has been fully completed

in accordance with the terms of the permit and the plans and specifications approved by the chief, the chief shall approve the construction. When one year has elapsed after approval of the completed construction, and the chief finds that within this period no fact has become apparent to indicate that the construction was not performed in accordance with the terms of the permit and the plans and specifications approved by the chief, or that the construction as performed would endanger life, health, or property, the chief shall release the bond or other security. No bond or other security shall be released until one year after final approval by the chief, unless the dam or levee has been modified so that it will not retain water and has been approved as nonhazardous after determination by the chief that the dam or levee as modified will not endanger life, health, or property.

- (F) When inspections required by this section are not being performed, the chief shall notify the person or governmental agency to which the permit has been issued that inspections are not being performed by the registered professional engineer and that the chief will inspect the remainder of the construction. Thereafter, the chief shall inspect the construction and the cost of inspection shall be charged against the owner. Failure of the registered professional engineer to submit required inspection reports shall be deemed notice that the engineer's inspections are not being performed.
- (G) The chief may order construction to cease on any dam or levee that is being built in violation of this section, and may prohibit the retention of water behind any dam or levee that has been built in violation of this section. The attorney general, upon written request of the chief, may bring an action for an injunction against any person who violates this section or to enforce an order or prohibition of the chief made pursuant to this section.
- (H) The chief may adopt rules in accordance with Chapter 119. of the Revised Code, for the design and construction of dams and levees for which a construction permit is required by this section or for which periodic inspection is required by section 1521.062 of the Revised Code, for establishing a filing fee schedule in lieu of the schedule established under division (B) of this section, for deposit and forfeiture of bonds and other securities required by section 1521.061 of the Revised Code, for the periodic inspection, operation, repair, improvement, alteration, or removal of all dams and levees, as specified in section 1521.062 of the Revised Code, and for establishing classes of dams or levees that are exempt from the requirements of this section and section 1521.062 of the Revised Code as being of a size, purpose, or situation that does not present a substantial hazard to life, health, or property. The chief may, by rule, limit the period during which a construction permit issued under this section is valid. The rules may allow for the extension of the period during which a permit is valid upon written request, provided that the written request includes a revised construction cost estimate, and may require the payment of an additional filing fee for the requested extension. If a construction permit expires without an extension before construction is completed, the person or agency shall apply for a new permit, and shall not continue construction until the new permit is issued.

Section 1521.061 Surety bond requirements of construction permits. Except as otherwise provided in this section, a construction permit shall not be issued under section 1521.06 of the Revised Code unless the person or governmental agency applying for the permit executes and files a surety bond conditioned on completion of the dam or levee in accordance with the terms of the permit and the plans and specifications approved by the chief of the division of soil and water resources, in an amount equal to fifty per cent of the estimated cost of the project.

If a permittee requests an extension of the time period during which a construction permit is valid in accordance with rules adopted under section 1521.06 of the Revised Code, the chief shall determine whether the revised construction cost estimate provided with the request exceeds the original construction cost estimate that was filed with the chief by more than twenty-five per cent. If the revised construction cost estimate exceeds the

original construction cost estimate by more than twenty-five per cent, the chief may require an additional surety bond to be filed so that the total amount of the surety bonds equals at least fifty per cent of the revised construction cost estimate.

The chief shall not approve any bond until it is personally signed and acknowledged by both principal and surety, or as to either by the attorney in fact thereof, with a certified copy of the power of attorney attached. The chief shall not approve the bond unless there is attached a certificate of the superintendent of insurance that the company is authorized to transact a fidelity and surety business in this state.

All bonds shall be given in a form prescribed by the chief and shall run to the state as obligee.

The applicant may deposit, in lieu of a bond, cash in an amount equal to the amount of the bond or United States government securities or negotiable certificates of deposit issued by any bank organized or transacting business in this state having a par value equal to or greater than the amount of the bond. Such cash or securities shall be deposited upon the same terms as bonds. If one or more certificates of deposit are deposited in lieu of a bond, the chief shall require the bank that issued any such certificate to pledge securities of the aggregate market value equal to the amount of the certificate that is in excess of the amount insured by the federal deposit insurance corporation. The securities to be pledged shall be those designated as eligible under section 135.18 of the Revised Code. The securities shall be security for the repayment of the certificate of deposit.

Immediately upon a deposit of cash, securities, or certificates of deposit, the chief shall deliver them to the treasurer of state, who shall hold them in trust for the purposes for which they have been deposited. The treasurer of state is responsible for the safekeeping of such deposits. An applicant making a deposit of cash, securities, or certificates of deposit may withdraw and receive from the treasurer of state, on the written order of the chief, all or any portion of the cash, securities, or certificates of deposit, upon depositing with the treasurer of state cash, other United States government securities, or negotiable certificates of deposit issued by any bank organized or transacting business in this state equal in par value to the par value of the cash, securities, or certificates of deposit withdrawn. An applicant may demand and receive from the treasurer of state all interest or other income from any such securities or certificates as it becomes due. If securities so deposited with and in the possession of the treasurer of state mature or are called for payment by the issuer thereof, the treasurer of state, at the request of the applicant who deposited them, shall convert the proceeds of the redemption or payment of the securities into such other United States government securities, negotiable certificates of deposit issued by any bank organized or transacting business in this state, or cash as the applicant designates.

When the chief finds that a person or governmental agency has failed to comply with the conditions of the person's or agency's bond, the chief shall make a finding of that fact and declare the bond, cash, securities, or certificates of deposit forfeited in the amount set by rule of the chief. The chief shall thereupon certify the total forfeiture to the attorney general, who shall proceed to collect that amount.

In lieu of total forfeiture, the surety, at its option, may cause the dam or levee to be completed as required by section 1521.06 of the Revised Code and rules of the chief, or otherwise rendered nonhazardous, or pay to the treasurer of state the cost thereof.

All moneys collected on account of forfeitures of bonds, cash, securities, and certificates of deposit under this section shall be credited to the dam safety fund created in section 1521.06 of the Revised Code. The chief shall make expenditures from the fund to complete dams and levees for which bonds have been forfeited or to otherwise render them nonhazardous.

Expenditures from the fund for those purposes shall be made pursuant to contracts entered into by the chief with persons who agree to furnish all of the materials, equipment, work, and labor as specified and provided in the contract.

A surety bond shall not be required for a permit for a dam or levee that is to be designed and constructed by an agency of the United States government, if the agency files with the chief written assurance of the agency's financial responsibility for the structure during the one-year period following the chief's approval of the completed construction provided for under division (E) of section 1521.06 of the Revised Code.

Section 1521.062 Periodic inspection of existing dams and levees. (A) All dams and levees constructed in this state and not exempted by this section or by the chief of the division of soil and water resources under section 1521.06 of the Revised Code shall be inspected periodically by the chief, except for classes of dams that, in accordance with rules adopted under this section, are required to be inspected by registered professional engineers who have been approved for that purpose by the chief. The inspection shall ensure that continued operation and use of the dam or levee does not constitute a hazard to life, health, or property. Periodic inspections shall not be required of the following structures:

- (1) A dam that is less than ten feet in height and has a storage capacity of not more than fifty acre-feet at the elevation of the top of the dam, as determined by the chief. For the purposes of this section, the height of a dam shall be measured from the natural stream bed or lowest ground elevation at the downstream or outside limit of the dam to the elevation of the top of the dam.
 - (2) A dam, regardless of height, that has a storage capacity of not more than fifteen acre-feet at the elevation of the top of the dam, as determined by the chief;
 - (3) A dam, regardless of storage capacity, that is six feet or less in height, as determined by the chief;
 - (4) A dam or levee belonging to a class exempted by the chief;
 - (5) A dam or levee that has been exempted in accordance with rules adopted under section 1521.064 of the Revised Code.
- (B) In accordance with rules adopted under this section, the owner of a dam that is in a class of dams that is designated in the rules for inspection by registered professional engineers shall obtain the services of a registered professional engineer who has been approved by the chief to conduct the periodic inspection of dams pursuant to schedules and other standards and procedures established in the rules. The registered professional engineer shall prepare a report of the inspection in accordance with the rules and provide the inspection report to the dam owner who shall submit it to the chief. A dam that is designated under the rules for inspection by a registered professional engineer but that is not inspected within a five-year period may be inspected by the chief at the owner's expense.
- (C) Intervals between periodic inspections shall be determined by the chief, but shall not exceed five years.
- (D) In the case of a dam or levee that the chief inspects, the chief shall furnish a report of the inspection to the owner of the dam or levee. With regard to a dam or levee that has been inspected, either by the chief or by a registered professional engineer, and that is the subject of an inspection report prepared or received by the chief, the chief shall inform the owner of any required repairs, maintenance, investigations, and other remedial and operational measures. The chief shall order the owner to perform such repairs, maintenance, investigations, or other remedial or operational measures as the chief considers necessary to safeguard life, health, or property. The order shall permit the owner a reasonable time in which to perform the needed repairs, maintenance, investigations, or other remedial measures, and the cost thereof shall be borne by the owner. All orders of the chief are subject to appeal as provided in Chapter 119. of the Revised Code. The

attorney general, upon written request of the chief, may bring an action for an injunction against any person who violates this section or to enforce an order of the chief made pursuant to this section.

- (E) The owner of a dam or levee shall monitor, maintain, and operate the structure and its appurtenances safely in accordance with state rules, terms and conditions of permits, orders, and other requirements issued pursuant to this section or section 1521.06 of the Revised Code. The owner shall fully and promptly notify the division of soil and water resources and other responsible authorities of any condition that threatens the safety of the structure and shall take all necessary actions to safeguard life, health, and property.
- (F) Before commencing the repair, improvement, alteration, or removal of a dam or levee, the owner shall file an application including plans, specifications, and other required information with the division and shall secure written approval of the application by the chief. Emergency actions by the owner required to safeguard life, health, or property are exempt from this requirement. The chief may, by rule, define maintenance, repairs, or other remedial measures of a routine nature that are exempt from this requirement.
- (G) The chief may remove or correct, at the expense of the owner, any unsafe structures found to be constructed or maintained in violation of this section or section 1521.06 of the Revised Code. In the case of an owner other than a governmental agency, the cost of removal or correction of any unsafe structure, together with a description of the property on which the unsafe structure is located, shall be certified by the chief to the county auditor and placed by the county auditor upon the tax duplicate. This cost is a lien upon the lands from the date of entry and shall be collected as other taxes and returned to the division. In the case of an owner that is a governmental agency, the cost of removal or correction of any unsafe structure shall be recoverable from the owner by appropriate action in a court of competent jurisdiction.
- (H) If the condition of any dam or levee is found, in the judgment of the chief, to be so dangerous to the safety of life, health, or property as not to permit time for the issuance and enforcement of an order relative to repair, maintenance, or operation, the chief shall employ any of the following remedial means necessary to protect life, health, and property:
 - (1) Lower the water level of the lake or reservoir by releasing water;
 - (2) Completely drain the lake or reservoir;
 - (3) Take such other measures or actions as the chief considers necessary to safeguard life, health, and property.

The chief shall continue in full charge and control of the dam or levee until the structure is rendered safe. The cost of the remedy shall be recoverable from the owner of the structure by appropriate action in a court of competent jurisdiction.

- (I) The chief may accept and expend gifts, bequests, and grants from the United States government or from any other public or private source and may contract with the United States government or any other agency or entity for the purpose of carrying out the dam safety functions set forth in this section and section 1521.06 of the Revised Code.
- (J) In accordance with Chapter 119. of the Revised Code, the chief shall adopt, and may amend or rescind, rules that do all of the following:
 - (1) Designate classes of dams for which dam owners must obtain the services of a registered professional engineer to periodically inspect the dams and to prepare reports of the inspections for submittal to the chief;

- (2) Establish standards in accordance with which the chief must approve or disapprove registered professional engineers to inspect dams together with procedures governing the approval process;
 - (3) Establish schedules, standards, and procedures governing periodic inspections and standards and procedures governing the preparation and submittal of inspection reports;
 - (4) Establish provisions regarding the enforcement of this section and rules adopted under it.
- (K) The owner of a dam or levee shall notify the chief in writing of a change in ownership of the dam or levee prior to the exchange of the property

Section 1521.063 Annual fee; actions against violators. (A) Except for the federal government, the owner of a dam, that is classified as a class I, class II, or class III dam under rules adopted under section 1521.06 of the Revised Code and subject to section 1521.062 of the Revised Code shall pay an annual fee, based upon the height of the dam, the linear foot length of the dam, and the per-acre foot of volume of water impounded by the dam. The fee shall be paid to the division of soil and water resources on or before the thirtieth day of June of each year. The annual fee shall be as follows until otherwise provided by rules adopted under this section:

- (1) For any dam classified as a class I dam under rules adopted by the chief of the division of soil and water resources under section 1521.06 of the Revised Code, three hundred dollars plus ten dollars per foot of height of dam, five cents per foot of length of the dam and five cents per-acre foot of water impounded by the dam;
- (2) For any dam classified as a class II dam under those rules, ninety dollars plus six dollars per foot of height of dam, five cents per foot of length of the dam and five cents per-acre foot of water impounded by the dam;
- (3) For any dam classified as a class III dam under those rules, ninety dollars plus four dollars per foot of height of the dam, five cents per foot of length of the dam, and five cents per-acre foot of volume of water impounded by the dam.

For purposes of this section, the height of a dam is the vertical height, to the nearest foot, as determined by the division under section 1521.062 of the Revised Code.

All fees collected under this section shall be deposited in the dam safety fund created in section 1521.06 of the Revised Code. Any owner who fails to pay any annual fee required by this section within sixty days after the due date shall be assessed a penalty of ten per cent of the annual fee plus interest at the rate of one-half per cent per month from the due date until the date of payment.

There is hereby created the compliant dam discount program to be administered by the chief. Under the program, the chief may reduce the amount of the annual fee that an owner of a dam is required to pay under division (A)(1), (2), or (3) of this section if the owner is in compliance with section 1521.062 of the Revised Code and has developed an emergency action plan pursuant to standards established in rules adopted under this section. The chief shall not discount an annual fee by more than twenty-five per cent of the total annual fee that is due. In addition, the chief shall not discount the annual fee that is due from the owner of a dam who has been assessed a penalty under this section.

(B) The chief shall, in accordance with Chapter 119. of the Revised Code and subject to the prior approval of the director of natural resources, adopt, and may amend or rescind, rules for the collection of fees and the administration, implementation, and enforcement of this section and for the establishment of an annual fee schedule in lieu of the schedule established under in division (A) of this section.

(C)(1) No person, political subdivision, or state governmental agency shall violate or fail to comply with this section or any rule or order adopted or issued under it.

(2) The attorney general, upon written request of the chief, may commence an action against any such violator. Any action under division (C)(2) of this section is a civil action.

(D) As used in this section, "political subdivision" includes townships, municipal corporations, counties, school districts, municipal universities, park districts, sanitary districts, and conservancy districts and subdivisions thereof.

Section 1521.064 Inspection Exemptions. The chief of the division of soil and water resources, in accordance with Chapter 119. of the Revised Code, shall adopt, and may amend and rescind, rules establishing a program under which dams and levees may be exempted from inspections under section 1521.062 of the Revised Code if the continued operation and use of, and any rupturing of or other structural damage to, the dams and levees will not constitute a hazard to life, health, or property. The rules shall establish, without limitation, all of the following:

(A) A procedure by which the owner of such a dam or levee may apply for an exemption under this section;

(B) The standards that a dam or levee shall meet in order to be exempted under this section;

(C) A procedure by which the chief shall periodically review the status of a dam or levee that has been exempted under this section to determine if the exemption should be rescinded;

(D) A requirement that the owner of any dam or levee exempted under this section shall agree, in writing, to accept liability for any injury, death, or loss to persons or property caused by the rupturing of or other structural damage to the dam or levee.

Section 1521.07 Right of entry. The chief of the division of soil and water resources or any employee in the service of the division may enter upon lands to make surveys and inspections in accordance with this chapter, when necessary in the discharge of the duties enumerated in this chapter.

Section 1521.99 Penalties. (A) Whoever violates division (E)(1) of section 1521.05 or division (E)(1) of section 1521.16 of the Revised Code is guilty of a misdemeanor of the fourth degree.

(B) Whoever violates section 1521.06 or 1521.062 [1521.06.2] of the Revised Code shall be fined not less than one hundred dollars nor more than one thousand dollars for each offense. Each day of violation constitutes a separate offense.