

OWNER RESPONSIBLE PROFESSIONAL INSPECTIONS FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. Why is my dam considered a large dam?

- A dam is defined as a structure in a waterway intended to impound or to divert water.
- A large dam is one that is over 6 feet high and impounds 50 acre-feet or more of water, or it is 25 feet high or more with more than 15 acre-feet of storage.

2. Why do I need to inspect my dam?

- Dam owners have always been responsible for safe operation and maintenance of their dams and inspection is a key element of any dam safety program.
- The statute requires owner-responsible professional inspections.
- Owners of dams are liable if a dam causes injury or property damage through failure or insufficient operation.

3. Where does it say I have to have my dam inspected every (2, 3, 4, 10) years?

- Chapter 31 of the State Statutes covers regulation and safety of dams.
- Ch. 31.19 is specific to dam inspections.
- Ch. 31.19(2)(ag) is the section of the statutes which lays out owner responsibility for inspection of large dams.
- <http://docs.legis.wi.gov/statutes/statutes/31> (LINK exits DNR site)

4. Why do I have to inspect my dam so often?

- Frequent inspections are important to ensure that dams are operated and maintained in a safe condition.
- The inspection schedule is based on the hazard potential of the dam.
- Frequent inspections help establish you as a responsible owner.
- We have always recommended that owners monitor and inspect their dams on a regular basis: weekly, monthly and thoroughly annually, with additional inspections after flooding.
- It is also important to have objective, trained eyes also look at your dam, and provide professional recommendations about repair and maintenance.
- The safety of a dam is improved if the deficiencies are corrected in a timely manner. Frequent inspections alert owners to deficiencies.

6. Why can't I inspect my dam myself?

- You can and should inspect your dam regularly. However, it is important to have objective, trained eyes also look at your dam, and provide professional recommendations about repairs and maintenance.
- The statute specifically requires that a professional engineer inspect your dam on a regular basis.
- A professional engineer must be registered in the State of Wisconsin and must affix his/her seal to the inspection report.

7. Our community has a professional engineer (PE) on staff. Can our PE do the required dam inspections?

- Your PE must have experience in dams, dam safety, inspection of dams, and the deficiencies common to the types of dams in Wisconsin.

- Your PE must have dam-related experience and knowledge of the regulations governing dam ownership, design and operation in Wisconsin.
- To properly inspect the dam and appurtenant works, your PE should have experience in technical disciplines such as civil engineering, geotechnical, geological, hydrologic, structural, and mechanical engineering.

8. I don't know how to hire an engineer. Will you recommend consultants?

- The Dam Safety Program has information on our website about hiring a consultant engineer and maintains a list of professional engineers
- We also have links to other websites with useful information.
- As the dam owner, you are responsible for making decisions about your dam and its future, as well as how you spend money for that dam.
- Each dam owner should review these materials, get a proposal from several engineers and hire the engineer that is the best fit for his/her needs.

9. What will the inspections cost?

- The cost of inspection will likely vary depending on the size, location and hazard rating of the dam.
- Without knowing which dam is to be inspected, consultants have been hesitant to estimate inspection costs, but have offered estimates ranging from \$2,000 to \$10,000.
- The first inspection of a dam by a consultant may be more costly than subsequent inspections on the same dam by the same consultant. With inspections due every two to four years, it will likely become less expensive.

10. Our lake association fees won't cover this. How will we pay for an inspection?

- You may have to increase your fees and start a maintenance/repair fund for the dam.
- You may want to consider forming a lake district to allow you to assess for costs related to the operation and maintenance of the dam.
- A lake district is eligible for grants for repair/reconstruction or removal of a dam.

11. Will grants pay for inspections?

- There are currently no grant programs that will pay solely for the cost of a dam inspection.
- Owners of dams in the state need to be fiscally responsible for their dam, which includes monitoring, inspection, operation, maintenance and necessary repairs to address deficiencies.
- If you do not have the financial resources to fulfill your responsibilities as a dam owner, the Department will try to assist you in finding alternatives to relieve the burden of dam ownership. These could include dam transfer or dam removal.

12. Can I change the hazard rating of my dam so I don't have to inspect so often?

- The hazard rating of your dam is based on the downstream development that could be affected by the failure of the dam and the zoning in place to prevent future development in the hazard area.
- A dam failure analysis may prove that the hazard to existing development is lower than what is currently estimated.
- Ensuring that the appropriate zoning is adopted downstream may lower your hazard rating, thus changing your inspection frequency.

13. What if I am no longer interested in owning or able to own my own dam?

- If you no longer want to be responsible for your dam you have two options:

- Transfer the dam to another responsible owner such as a lake association or a municipality who is financially capable of caring for the dam <http://dnr.wi.gov/topic/Dams/sellingAndTranfers.html>; or
- Apply to abandon the permit for the dam, and remove the dam to restore the natural waterway <http://dnr.wi.gov/topic/Dams/DamRemoval.html>

14. Where can I get further information if I have more questions?

- [Dam safety page](#)(LINK to main dam safety page)
- [Email dam safety](#)(E-mail Dam Safety for more questions)