



CHICHESTER DAM – DAM SAFETY EMERGENCY PLAN

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SAFETY EMERGENCY PLAN
FOR CHICHESTER DAM



About the Dam Safety Emergency Plan

Chichester Dam is vital for our region, supplying about 35 per cent of the Lower Hunter's drinking water. As the dam's owner, Hunter Water is committed to ensuring the dam's safety through a rigorous maintenance and monitoring program.

As part of this program, we prepare, maintain and implement a Dam Safety Emergency Plan (DSEP) in accordance with the *Dams Safety Act 2015*.

As required under the Act, the DSEP outlines clear procedures and responsibilities for emergency organisations to follow during an event that could potentially lead to a failure of the dam wall.

The DSEP is reviewed and updated annually, with a more detailed review completed every 5 years.

Copies of the DSEP are held by NSW State Emergency Service (NSW SES), NSW Police and Dams Safety NSW. The DSEP is a comprehensive document that provides a single point of reference for how these organisations respond during a dam emergency. It contains key technical information about the dam, such as failure scenarios, maps, and technical drawings as outlined in the [Dams Safety NSW guideline – Emergency plans](#).

It also contains sensitive information, including addresses, names and phone numbers.

The full DSEP is not publicly available. However, this fact sheet summarises the key elements of the DSEP for Chichester Dam.

Types of dam emergencies

We plan for a range of emergency scenarios in the DSEP, which could potentially escalate to a dam failure. These emergencies include very rare flooding, earthquake and other emergencies such as terrorism or sabotage.

In each scenario, the procedures implemented by emergency response organisations will be similar.

The highest-risk scenario at Chichester Dam is a very rare flooding event, which places considerable stresses on the dam, and could lead to a dam failure. The annual probability of this occurring has been calculated to be a 1 in 500 chance per year, according to the [2023 Chichester Dam risk assessment](#), which is available on our website.

Dam alert levels

The DSEP is required to include a series of **flood alert levels**. When the DSEP is triggered, a Hunter Water response team is activated with personnel onsite to monitor the dam, supported by a Dam Safety Engineer and a coordinator, who work on a 24/7 roster until the event is over.

Hunter Water
Customer enquiries 1300 657 657

chichester.dam@hunterwater.com.au
hunterwater.com.au

Emergency response organisations follow certain procedures as each alert level is triggered. In consultation with emergency services, we have recently revised these thresholds downwards, to provide earlier warning and greater time to prepare for the potential need to initiate evacuations. This means that there will be more frequent alert notifications for the dam. There are three levels of alert:

- **White Alert** = the depth of water flowing over the spillway is 0.8m (157m AHD (Australian Height Datum)). The white alert is a readiness state used to ensure preparations are in place for subsequent alerts. NSW SES may issue **flood advice** to residents downstream of the dam, based on the predicted consequences.
- **Amber Alert** = the depth of water flowing over the spillway is 1.3m (157.5m AHD). NSW SES may issue a **watch and act – prepare to evacuate or prepare to isolate warning** to residents downstream based on the predicted consequences.
- **Red Alert** = the depth of water flowing over the spillway is 1.8m (158m AHD). NSW SES may issue an **evacuation warning – evacuate now/before order** or **emergency warning – move to higher ground** to residents downstream based on the predicted consequences.

Who will residents hear from in an emergency?

Hunter Water does not have the authority to issue evacuation orders. Our role is to provide information about the dam to emergency organisations who consider our advice and the procedures in the DSEP and can issue these orders to residents.

The NSW SES/Police will issue appropriate directions to residents depending on the alert level.

Advice, warnings, and evacuation orders for residents will **only** come from NSW SES or Police, depending on what is causing the emergency. In a flood, NSW SES is the lead agency. Police will lead during other types of emergencies such as earthquake, terrorism or sabotage.

NSW SES/Police advice, warnings and evacuations may be issued via:

- [Hazards Near Me app](#)
- Emergency Alert (text message or landline)
- local radio
- door knocking

Other communication methods:

- Local media
- SES Facebook pages
- NSW SES website

Hunter Water issues advisory messages to residents when an alert level is reached. **Hunter Water** will only send a text message to residents and property owners

who are located upstream of Bandon Grove, whose contact details are listed in the DSEP.

Based on their own emergency plans, these residents may choose to leave early if they are concerned about their escape route being cut.

Hunter Water's text message to these residents will only include the alert level and advise residents to take note of NSW SES/Police directions.

What is *not* included in the DSEP

The DSEP does **not** include specific instructions for residents about what to do at their property once an alert level is reached. Such advice, warnings or evacuation messages to residents will be issued by either NSW SES or Police.

The DSEP does **not** include procedures for all types of emergencies, such as bushfire. The DSEP only addresses events that have the potential to cause a dam failure like flood, earthquake, terrorism or sabotage.

Understand your property's risk

Although a dam failure is unlikely, it's important to understand the risk at your own property so that you can plan to take appropriate action if a dam safety alert level is triggered.

Hunter Water holds the latest mapping that shows the possible inundation areas in a range of dam failure scenarios. If you would like to access these maps to assist you to prepare your emergency plan, please contact the Dam Safety Team on 1300 657 657 or email chichester.dam@hunterwater.com.au.

Preparing your emergency response

If you live or own property downstream of Chichester Dam – on the Chichester or Williams rivers, between the dam and Clarence Town – there are things you can do now to prepare for a dam-related emergency, including:

- **understand your property's risk** by checking Hunter Water's flood and inundation maps (contact us to view your property on the map)
- **make an emergency plan** for your property using the NSW SES emergency planning tool – including how you'll maintain access to communication during an emergency.
- download the **'Hazards Near Me'** app and turn on notifications.
- if you live or own property upstream of Bandon Grove, provide your contact details to Hunter Water and advise us if your details change.

Additional resources to prepare for emergencies:

- [NSW SES emergency planning tool](#)
- [Local Flood Emergency Sub Plan](#)
- [New South Wales State Flood Plan](#)
- [NSW SES website 'During a flood'](#)