

Draft Dam Safety Policy (POL-5XXX)

Summary of Changes



This document provides an overview of the substantial changes made in the public review draft of POL-5XXX but does not describe every change. It is intended to provide a high-level overview of the draft changes, organized by the section numbers in the new draft. This document should help organize public comments.

This is a new policy, that is a reorganization of existing policies and will serve as a standalone policy document for the DSO.

- [New draft](#)
- [Current versions of DSO policies are available online.](#)

Section 1: Definitions

- Included four recurring definitions found throughout the original 27 DSO policies.
- Clarifies interpretation of “active storage” and added a definition for “dams and controlling works.”

Section 2: Applicability of DSO Regulations (Combined POLs 5102, 5103, and 5104)

- Clarifies exemptions (e.g., FERC-licensed/exempt hydropower projects, federally owned dams with established safety programs).
- Affirms Ecology’s inspection and regulatory authority under RCW 43.21A.064 and RCW 86.16.035 and states DSO will issue written jurisdictional determinations when needed.

Section 3: Multiple Dams in a Series (POL 5106)

- Clarifies that DSO will evaluate multiple hydraulically connected dams as a single system for volumetric threshold and hazard classification.
- Clarifies that individually exempt (<10 acre-feet) dams may become regulated if cumulative/system failure poses significant or high downstream risk.

Section 4: Engineering Approval, Issuance of Construction Permit, Construction Change Orders (Combined POLs 5201, 5202, 5204, 5205, and 5206)

- Reinforces that construction or modification affecting dam safety components requires DSO approval and a permit under RCW 90.03.350.
- Defines engineering approval requirements, construction inspection plan review, phased construction conditions, and limits of DSO plan approval.

Section 5: Periodic Inspection of Existing Dams & Records Management (Combined POLs 5401, 5402, 5403, and 5404)

- Establishes inspection intervals based on downstream hazard classification, with flexibility for risk-based prioritization.
- Clarifies records retention responsibilities and treatment of federally regulated projects.

Section 6: Dams Constructed Without Prior Dam Safety Office Approval of Plans and Specifications (Combined POLs 5405 and 5406)

- Identifies unapproved construction of all dams as a violation of RCW 90.03.350.
- Establishes DSO authority to inspect and require demonstration of structural integrity before allowing reservoir filling.

Section 7: Compliance Actions (POL 5502)

- Clarifies enforcement prioritization based on hazard classification within the DSO compliance tracking database to guide enforcement decisions.

Section 8: Operation and Maintenance Manuals and Emergency Action Plans for Dams (POL 5601)

- Requires O&M Manuals for all dams and EAPs for High and Significant hazard dams.
- Recommends emergency procedures for Low hazard dams and incorporation into O&M manuals.

Section 9: Spillway Requirements at Off-Channel Storage Facilities (POL 5602)

- Clarifies that off-channel storage facilities are considered appurtenant works to dams and thus subject to Chapter 173-175 WAC.

- References Dam Safety Guidelines for spillway design standards.
- Identifies limited exceptions where emergency spillways may not be required based on excess storage or operational capacity.

Section 10: Emergency Response and Discretionary Actions During Emergency or Exigency Conditions (Combined POLs 5701 and 5702)

- Describes DSO authority to take control and implement emergency actions under WAC 173-175-610.

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