

Levee Safety: GAO Addresses U.S. Army Corps of Engineers/FEMA Activities



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The United States Government Accountability Office ("GAO") issued a July 2016 report titled *LEVEE SAFETY – ARMY CORPS AND FEMA MADE LITTLE PROGRESS IN CARRYING OUT REQUIRED ACTIVITIES* ("Report").

The Report examines the United States Army Corps of Engineers and Federal Emergency Management Agency's ("FEMA") progress in carrying out certain Congressionally mandated activities related to levee safety.

Levees are man-made structures which include earthen embankments or concrete floodwalls. A number of levees are found in Arkansas.

Levees are built to reduce the risk of flooding. As a result, their failure poses threats to people and property.

GAO estimates that there are over 100,000 miles of levees across the United States. A substantial percentage of such levees are owned and operated by nonfederal entities. The Corps and FEMA are the two principal federal agencies with the authority to address levee safety.

The United States Congress addressed levee safety through the Water Resources Reform and Development Act of 2014. The federal legislation requires that the Corps and FEMA assume the primary role in certain national levee-safety activities. Such activities include developing a national levee inventory.

The GAO Report concludes that the Corps and FEMA have made "little progress" in implementing primary national levee-safety activities required in the 2014 Act. It states that while the Corps has been developing a national levee inventory both agencies have not taken action on the remaining national levee-safety related activities required by the federal legislation.

Corps and FEMA officials are stated to have identified resource constraints as a primary reason for the lack of progress. Further, Corps officials stated that the failure to implement these activities could result in safety risks and federal financial risk for disaster relief. GAO concludes that neither agency has a plan for implementing the remaining activities required by the legislation.

The Report includes a description of the types of levee structures and potential failures. Also reviewed are the Corps' and FEMA's major levee-related programs.

[A copy of the report can be downloaded here.](#)

