

Dam Failure Mechanisms and Risk Assessment

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DAM FAILURE MECHANISMS AND RISK ASSESSMENT

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WILEY

This edition first published 2016
© 2016 John Wiley & Sons Singapore Pte. Ltd.

Registered Office

John Wiley & Sons Singapore Pte. Ltd., 1 Fusionopolis Walk, #07-01 Solaris South Tower, Singapore 138628.

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Zhang, L. M. (Limin), author. | Peng, Ming, 1981– author. | Chang, Dongsheng, 1983– author. | Xu, Yao, 1982– author.
Title: Dam failure mechanisms and risk assessment / Limin Zhang, Ming Peng, Dongsheng Chang, Yao Xu.
Description: Singapore ; Hoboken, NJ : John Wiley & Sons, 2016. | Includes bibliographical references and index.
Identifiers: LCCN 2016010573 | ISBN 9781118558515 (cloth) | ISBN 9781118558546 (epub)
Subjects: LCSH: Dam failures.
Classification: LCC TC550.2 .Z44 2016 | DDC 627/.8–dc23
LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2016010573>

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Set in 10/12pt Times by SPi Global, Pondicherry, India
Printed and bound in Singapore by Markono Print Media Pte Ltd

Foreword

I felt privileged to write the foreword for the book by Desmond Hartford and Gregory Baecher (2004) *Risk and Uncertainty in Dam Safety*, published by Thomas Telford Ltd in 2004. In that book, the authors described probabilistic analysis tools for dam risk analysis and decision-making, including guiding principles for risk analysis, methods for reliability analyses, and decision-making tools such as event tree and fault tree analyses.

This new book by Zhang, Peng, Chang, and Xu, *Dam Failure Mechanisms and Risk Assessment*, published by John Wiley & Sons, Ltd in 2016, presents the subjects in more detail by emphasizing practical applications of the analyses. The book describes the causes, processes, and consequences of dam failures. It covers up-to-date statistics of past dam failures and near-failures, mechanisms of dam failures, dam breaching process modeling, flood routing and inundation analyses, flood consequence analyses, and dam-breaching emergency management decisions. The authors integrate the physical processes of dam breaching and the mathematical aspects of risk assessment and management and describe methodologies for achieving optimal decision-making under uncertainty. The book emphasizes the two most common failure mechanisms for embankment dams: internal erosion, which has received increased attention in recent years, and overtopping. Empirical and numerical methods are used to determine dam breaching parameters such as breach geometry and peak flow rate, and for analyzing the dam breaching flood routing downstream.

The methodologies described by the authors may be used by government dam regulatory agencies for evaluating risks, and by dam owners to evaluate dam safety and the planning and prioritizing of remedial actions. I strongly recommend this up-to-date book, as it represents a most valuable contribution to the state of the art, paving the way for practical applications of probabilistic analysis tools to dam risk assessment and management.

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Foreword

As of 2015, the International Commission on Large Dams (ICOLD) has registered more than 60,000 large dams higher than 15 m around the world. Among these, 38,000 are in China. With functions of flood control, irrigation, hydropower, water supply, etc., dams contribute significantly to social-economic development and prosperity. On the other hand, dam failures do occur sometimes and can result in huge loss of life and property. Accordingly dam safety is of great importance to society. China alone has reported more than 3500 cases of failures of constructed dams. In the past 15 years or so, China also faced the mitigation of risks of large landslide dams, particularly those triggered by the 2008 Wenchuan earthquake.

Dam risk management requires not only a good understanding of dam failure mechanisms and probability, but also rapid evaluation of flood routing time and potential flooding areas. For instance, in the mitigation of the risks of the Tangjiashan landslide dam in June 2008, three likely overtopping failure modes were considered, the dam breaching impact area for each failure mode was evaluated and the flooding routing time was forecast. Consequently, approximately 250,000 people downstream of the dam were evacuated before the breaching of the large landslide dam. The book *Dam Failure Mechanisms and Risk Assessment* by Zhang, Peng, Chang, and Xu covers the wide spectrum of knowledge required for such a complex dam risk analysis and management case. This book is unique in that:

1. It is the first book that introduces the causes, processes, consequences of dam failures and possible risk mitigation measures in one nutshell;
2. It integrates the physical processes of dam failures and the mathematical aspects of risk assessment in a concise manner;
3. It emphasizes integrating theory and practice to better demonstrate the application of risk assessment and decision methodologies to real cases;
4. It intends to formulate dam-failure emergency management steps in a scientific structure.

ICOLD published statistics of dam failures in 1995, which have not been updated in the past 20 years. This book publishes three of the most updated and largest databases: a database of 1443 cases of constructed dam failures, a database of 1044 cases of landslide dam failures, and a database of 1004 cases of dike failures. The latest statistics of failures of constructed dams,

landslide dams and dikes are reported accordingly. I consider the compilation of these latest databases one of the most important contributions to dam safety in the past 20 years.

I am confident this book will assist dam or dike safety agencies in evaluating the risks of dams, making decisions for risk mitigation, and planning emergency actions.

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Preface

Every dam or dike failure touches the nerve of the public, as in the cases of the Banqiao dam failure in China in August 1975, the New Orleans dike failures during Hurricane Katrina in August 2005 and the Tangjiashan landslide dam breach in China in June 2008. The Banqiao dam failure caused the inundation of an area of 12,000 km² and the loss of more than 26,000 lives. The dike failures in New Orleans resulted in a death count of approximately 1,600 and an economic loss of US\$100–200 billion, making it the single most costly catastrophic failure of an engineered system in history. The failure of the Tangjiashan landslide dam in June 2008 prompted the evacuation of 250,000 residents downstream the dam for two weeks.

Dam or dike risk analysis involves not only the calculation of probability of failure, but also the simulation of the failure process, the flood routing downstream the dam or dike, and the evaluation of flood severity, elements at risk, the vulnerability of the elements at risk to the dam-breaching flood and the flood risks. Once the risk is analyzed, it must be assessed against risk tolerance criteria. If the risk level is deemed too high, proper risk mitigation measures, either engineering or non-engineering, should be taken to lower the risk level. The effectiveness of any risk mitigation measures and the impact of any mitigation measures on the overall risk profile should also be evaluated. Non-engineering risk mitigation measures such as warning and evacuation are often the most effective. When a dam or dike failure is imminent, a dynamic assessment of hazard propagation and scientific decisions for risk mitigation are preferred. The worldwide trend is to make accountable decisions by quantitatively expressing the dam-failure risks.

The aforementioned dam risk analysis and management process involves physical aspects of dam failure mechanisms, failure processes, flood routing and flood damage, as well as risk assessment and management methodologies. Several excellent books are available on selected topics of dam safety. For instance, Hartford and Baecher (2004) describe uncertainties in dam safety and present probability theory and techniques for dam risk assessment; Singh (1996) introduces hydraulics of dam breaching modelling. In this book, we intend to introduce in one nutshell the essential components that enable a quantitative dam risk assessment. The mechanisms, processes and consequences of dam failures as well as risk assessment and decision methodologies for dam emergency management are introduced.

This book consists of three parts, with Part I devoted to dam and dike failure databases and statistics, Part II to dam failure mechanisms and breaching process modeling and Part III to dam failure risk assessment and management.

Part I (Chapters 1–5) presents three latest databases of the failure of 1443 constructed dams, 1044 landslide dams and 1004 dikes. The statistical analyses of failures of constructed embankment dams, landslide dams, concrete dams and dikes are presented separately. International Commission on Large Dams (ICOLD) released a statistical analysis of dam failures in 1995 and an updated analysis is long-awaited. In this book, the statistics for the failure of various types of dams are updated including the latest failure cases around the world and failure cases in China that were not included in the ICOLD analysis in 1995. The detailed failure cases are presented in Appendices A and B, which are of retention value to the dam safety community.

Part II (Chapters 6–9) presents two most common dam failure mechanisms (i.e. internal erosion in dams and their foundations and overtopping erosion of dams) and dam breaching modeling. The initiation, continuation and progression of concentrated leak erosion, backward erosion, contact erosion and suffusion are described separately in Chapter 6. The mechanics of overtopping erosion, methods for determining soil erodibility parameters and classification of soil erodibility are presented in Chapter 7. These two chapters lay the foundation for understanding and simulating the process of dam failure. Subsequently, we present methodologies of dam breaching process modeling and flood routing analysis following the time sequence of a dam failure: dam breach modeling and determination of dam breaching parameters such as breach geometry and peak flow rate (Chapter 8), and analysis of dam-breach flood routing downstream the dam (Chapter 9).

Part III (Chapters 10–14) presents key components in assessing the risks of a specific dam. This part begins with the introduction of several methods for analyzing the probability of failure of dams (Chapter 10). Subsequently, we present methodologies for the evaluation of inundation zones and vulnerability to dam-breaching floods (Chapter 11), the assessment of dam failure risks (Chapter 12), and dam breach contingency risk management and optimal decision making under uncertainty (Chapter 13). Finally, risk-based decision making is illustrated in the case study of the Tangjiashan landslide dam failure (Chapter 14).

Limin Zhang

Acknowledgements

Many individuals have contributed to the methodologies presented in *Dam Failure Mechanisms and Risk Assessment*. Several graduate students and post-doctoral research fellows, over the years, developed numerical methods for simulating dam and dike failure processes and flood routing, and assessing dam-failure risks. Special thanks go to, in alphabetical order, Kit Chan, Chen Chen, Hongxin Chen, Qun Chen, Jozsef Danka, Liang Gao, Mingzi Jiang, Jinhui Li, Yi Liu, Tianhua Xu, Jie Zhang, Lulu Zhang, Shuai Zhang, and Hongfen Zhao.

In the past decade, we collaborated closely with several research teams on contemporary dam safety issues, particularly with Prof. Jinsheng Jia of China Institute of Water Resources and Hydropower Research (IWHR) on compilation of a database of dam failures and distresses, with Prof. Jianmin Zhang of Tsinghua University on dam safety under extreme seismic and blasting loading conditions, with Prof. Runqiu Huang of State Key Laboratory for Geohazard Prevention and Environmental Protection and Prof. Yong You of Institute of Mountain Hazards and Environment of the Chinese Academy of Sciences on mitigating the risks of the landslide dams triggered by the Wenchuan earthquake, with Prof. Dianqing Li and Prof. Chuangbing Zhou of Wuhan University on the life-cycle safety of dam abutment slopes, and with Sichuan Department of Transportation on risk-based decision for mitigating the risks of debris flow dams for highway reconstruction near the epicenter of the Wenchuan earthquake. We were fortunate to have had so many opportunities to solve contemporary practical dam safety problems. The research collaborators are gratefully acknowledged.

The late Prof. Wilson Tang is fondly remembered by all the co-authors of this book. He offered enthusiastic encouragement for us to initiate the book project. We sincerely thank Professors Alfred Ang, Hongwei Huang, Bas Jonkman, Suzanne Lacasse, Chack Fan Lee and Farrokh Nadim who provided critical comments on the PhD theses supervised by the first author. These theses form part of this book. We also appreciate the efforts of Nithya Sechin, Maggie Zhang, Adalfin Jayasingh and Paul Beverley of John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, who edited the book, and those who reviewed the book proposal.

We are grateful to Natural Science Foundation of China for their financial support under grant Nos. 50828901, 51129902 and 41402257, to the Research Grants Council of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region under grant Nos. C6012-15G and 16212514, to Sichuan Department of Transportation under contract No. SCXS01-13Z00110/11PN and to the Ministry of Science and Technology under grant No. 2011CB013506.

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To Linda Li, Yan Zhu, Xin Wang, and Jing Bai

Contents

Foreword by Kaare Høeg	xiii
Foreword by Jinsheng Jia	xiv
Preface	xvi
Acknowledgements	xviii
About the Authors	xix
PART I DAM AND DIKE FAILURE DATABASES	1
1 Dams and Their Components	3
1.1 Classification of Dams	3
1.2 Constructed Embankment Dams	4
1.3 Landslide Dams	7
1.4 Concrete Gravity Dams	7
1.5 Concrete Arch Dams	8
1.6 Dikes	10
2 Statistical Analysis of Failures of Constructed Embankment Dams	11
2.1 Database of Failures of Constructed Embankment Dams	11
2.2 Failure Modes and Processes	11
2.2.1 <i>Overtopping</i>	16
2.2.2 <i>Internal Erosion</i>	17
2.3 Common Causes of Embankment Dam Failures	19
2.4 Failure of Different Types of Embankment Dams	21
2.4.1 <i>Analysis of Homogeneous and Composite Earthfill Dams</i>	23
2.4.2 <i>Analysis of Earthfill Dams with Corewalls</i>	23
3 Statistical Analysis of Failures of Landslide Dams	25
3.1 Database of Failures of Landslide Dams	25
3.1.1 <i>Locations of Landslide Dams</i>	25
3.1.2 <i>Formation Times of Landslide Dams</i>	26
3.1.3 <i>Triggers of Landslide Dams</i>	26

3.1.4	<i>Types of Landslide</i>	26
3.1.5	<i>Dam Heights and Lake Volumes</i>	32
3.2	Stability, Longevity, and Failure Modes of Landslide Dams	33
3.2.1	<i>Stability of Landslide Dams</i>	33
3.2.2	<i>Longevity of Landslide Dams</i>	35
3.2.3	<i>Failure Modes</i>	36
3.3	Mitigation Measures for Landslide Dams	37
3.3.1	<i>Stages of Landslide Dam Risk Mitigation</i>	38
3.3.2	<i>Engineering Mitigation Measures for Landslide Dams</i>	39
3.3.3	<i>Engineering Measures for the Landslide Dams Induced by the Wenchuan Earthquake</i>	41
3.3.4	<i>Mitigation Measures for the Tangjiashan Landslide Dam</i>	51
4	Statistical Analysis of Failures of Concrete Dams	53
4.1	Database of Failures of Concrete Dams	53
4.2	Failure Modes and Processes	53
4.3	Common Causes of Concrete Dam Failures	55
5	Statistical Analysis of Failures of Dikes	57
5.1	Introduction	57
5.2	Database of Dike Breaching Cases	57
5.3	Evaluation of Dike Failure Mechanisms	59
5.3.1	<i>Most Relevant Failure Mechanisms</i>	59
5.3.2	<i>Statistics of Observed Failure Mechanisms</i>	62
PART II	DAM FAILURE MECHANISMS AND BREACHING PROCESS MODELING	67
6	Internal Erosion in Dams and Their Foundations	69
6.1	Concepts of Internal Erosion	69
6.2	Mechanisms of Initiation of Internal Erosion	72
6.2.1	<i>Concentrated Leak Erosion</i>	72
6.2.2	<i>Backward Erosion</i>	73
6.2.3	<i>Contact Erosion</i>	73
6.2.4	<i>Suffusion</i>	74
6.3	Initiation of Concentrated Leak Erosion Through Cracks	74
6.3.1	<i>Causes of Concentrated Leak</i>	75
6.3.2	<i>Need for Studying Soil Erodibility for Concentrated Leak Erosion</i>	80
6.3.3	<i>Laboratory Tests on Concentrated Leak Erosion</i>	81
6.3.4	<i>Factors Affecting Concentrated Leak Erosion</i>	83
6.3.5	<i>Soil Dispersivity</i>	84
6.4	Initiation of Backward Erosion	87
6.4.1	<i>Susceptibility of a Dam or Dike to Backward Erosion</i>	87
6.4.2	<i>Methods for Assessing Backward Erosion</i>	89
6.4.3	<i>Formation of a Pipe due to Backward Erosion</i>	92

6.5	Initiation of Contact Erosion	93
6.5.1	<i>Fundamental Aspects of Contact Erosion Process</i>	94
6.5.2	<i>Laboratory Investigation on Contact Erosion</i>	96
6.5.3	<i>Threshold of Contact Erosion</i>	100
6.6	Initiation of Suffusion	102
6.6.1	<i>Control Parameters for Likelihood of Suffusion</i>	102
6.6.2	<i>Laboratory Testing of Suffusion</i>	103
6.6.3	<i>Geometrical Criteria for Internal Stability of Soils</i>	108
6.6.4	<i>Critical Hydraulic Gradients for Suffusion</i>	115
6.7	Filter Criteria	120
6.7.1	<i>Functions of Filter</i>	120
6.7.2	<i>Filter Criteria</i>	121
6.8	Continuation of Internal Erosion	124
6.9	Progression of Internal Erosion	125
6.10	Suggested Topics for Further Research	126
7	Mechanics of Overtopping Erosion of Dams	127
7.1	Mechanics of Surface Erosion	127
7.1.1	<i>Incipient Motion of Sediment</i>	128
7.1.2	<i>Sediment Transport</i>	133
7.2	Determination of Erodibility of Soils	144
7.2.1	<i>Critical Erosive Shear Stress</i>	144
7.2.2	<i>Coefficient of Erodibility</i>	145
7.2.3	<i>Laboratory Tests</i>	147
7.2.4	<i>Field Tests</i>	151
7.2.5	<i>Classification of Soil Erodibility</i>	155
7.3	Characteristics of Overtopping Erosion Failure of Dams	157
7.3.1	<i>Homogeneous Embankment Dams with Cohesionless Materials</i>	157
7.3.2	<i>Homogeneous Embankment Dams with Cohesive Materials</i>	158
7.3.3	<i>Composite Embankment Dams</i>	159
7.4	Suggested Topics for Further Research	159
8	Dam Breach Modeling	161
8.1	Methods for Dam Breach Modeling	161
8.2	Dam Breaching Data	163
8.2.1	<i>Embankment Dam Breaching Data</i>	163
8.2.2	<i>Landslide Dam Breaching Data</i>	165
8.2.3	<i>Dike Breaching Data</i>	165
8.3	Empirical Analysis Methods	166
8.3.1	<i>Multivariable Regression</i>	166
8.3.2	<i>Empirical Breaching Parameters for Constructed Embankment Dams</i>	169
8.3.3	<i>Empirical Breaching Parameters for Landslide Dams</i>	179
8.3.4	<i>Empirical Breaching Parameters for Dikes</i>	187
8.3.5	<i>Comparison of Breaching Parameters for Landslide Dams and Constructed Embankment Dams</i>	189

8.4	Numerical Simulation of Overtopping Erosion	192
8.4.1	<i>Simplified Physically Based Methods</i>	197
8.4.2	<i>Detailed Physically Based Methods</i>	206
8.4.3	<i>Case Studies</i>	211
8.5	Numerical Simulation of Internal Erosion	215
8.5.1	<i>Continuum Methods</i>	215
8.5.2	<i>Particle Level Analysis</i>	218
8.5.3	<i>Case Studies</i>	218
9	Analysis of Dam Breaching Flood Routing	222
9.1	River Hydraulics	222
9.1.1	<i>One-dimensional Models</i>	223
9.1.2	<i>Two-dimensional Models</i>	223
9.2	Numerical Models for Flood Routing Analysis	224
9.2.1	<i>One-dimensional Numerical Models</i>	224
9.2.2	<i>Two-dimensional Numerical Models</i>	227
9.2.3	<i>Coupling of 1D/2D Numerical Models</i>	229
9.3	Example – Tangjiashan Landslide Dam Failure	229
9.3.1	<i>Geometric Information</i>	229
9.3.2	<i>Dam Breaching Simulation</i>	232
9.3.3	<i>Boundary and Initial Conditions</i>	232
9.3.4	<i>Flood Routing Analysis and Results</i>	232
PART III DAM FAILURE RISK ASSESSMENT AND MANAGEMENT		241
10	Analysis of Probability of Failure of Dams	243
10.1	Introduction	243
10.2	Analysis Methods	243
10.2.1	<i>Failure Modes and Effects Analysis</i>	243
10.2.2	<i>Event Tree</i>	244
10.2.3	<i>Fault Tree</i>	246
10.2.4	<i>First-order Reliability Method/First-order Second-moment Method</i>	247
10.2.5	<i>Monte Carlo Simulation</i>	250
10.2.6	<i>Bayesian Networks</i>	250
10.3	Examples of Probabilistic Analysis of Dam Failure	253
10.3.1	<i>Probabilistic Analysis of Chinese Dam Distresses</i>	253
10.3.2	<i>Probabilistic Analysis of the Chenbihe Dam Distresses Using Bayesian Networks</i>	264
11	Vulnerability to Dam Breaching Floods	273
11.1	Concepts of Vulnerability	273
11.2	Human Vulnerability to Dam Breaching Floods	273
11.2.1	<i>Human Stability in Flood</i>	274
11.2.2	<i>Influence Factors</i>	277
11.2.3	<i>Methods for Evaluating Human Vulnerability Factor in a Flood</i>	278
11.2.4	<i>Database of Fatalities in Dam/Dike Breaching or Other Floods</i>	283

11.3	Bayesian Network Analysis of Human Vulnerability to Floods	284
11.3.1	<i>Bayesian Networks</i>	284
11.3.2	<i>Building the Bayesian Network for Human Vulnerability</i>	285
11.3.3	<i>Quantifying the Networks</i>	291
11.3.4	<i>Validation of the Model</i>	297
11.4	Damage to Buildings and Infrastructures	300
11.4.1	<i>Flood Action on Buildings</i>	300
11.4.2	<i>Models for Building Damage Evaluation</i>	303
11.4.3	<i>Relationship between Building Damage and Loss of Life</i>	305
11.5	Suggested Topics for Further Research	306
12	Dam Failure Risk Assessment	307
12.1	Risk and Risk Assessment	307
12.1.1	<i>Definition of Risk</i>	307
12.1.2	<i>Risk Management</i>	308
12.2	Dam Failure Risk Analysis	311
12.2.1	<i>Scope Definition</i>	311
12.2.2	<i>Hazards Identification</i>	311
12.2.3	<i>Identification of Failure Modes</i>	312
12.2.4	<i>Estimation of Failure Probability</i>	312
12.2.5	<i>Evaluation of Elements at Risk</i>	313
12.2.6	<i>Vulnerability Evaluation</i>	314
12.2.7	<i>Risk Estimation</i>	314
12.3	Risk Assessment	315
12.3.1	<i>Risk Tolerance Criteria</i>	315
12.3.2	<i>ALARP Considerations</i>	319
12.4	Suggested Topics for Further Research	321
13	Dam Failure Contingency Risk Management	322
13.1	Process of Contingency Risk Management	322
13.1.1	<i>Observation and Prediction</i>	323
13.1.2	<i>Decision-making</i>	323
13.1.3	<i>Warning</i>	324
13.1.4	<i>Response</i>	325
13.1.5	<i>Evacuation</i>	326
13.2	Decision-making Under Uncertainty	328
13.2.1	<i>Decision Tree</i>	329
13.2.2	<i>Multi-phase Decision</i>	330
13.2.3	<i>Influence Diagrams</i>	333
13.3	Dynamic Decision-Making	334
13.3.1	<i>Dam Failure Emergency Management</i>	336
13.3.2	<i>Dynamic Decision-making Framework</i>	339
13.3.3	<i>Time Series Models for Estimating Dam Failure Probability</i>	342
13.3.4	<i>Evaluation of the Consequences of Dam Failures</i>	348
13.3.5	<i>Features of DYDEM</i>	350
13.4	Suggested Topics for Further Research	351

14 Case Study: Risk-based Decision-making for the Tangjiashan Landslide Dam Failure	353
14.1 Timeline for Decision-making for the Tangjiashan Landslide Dam Failure	353
14.2 Prediction of Dam Break Probability with Time Series Analysis	355
14.2.1 Forecasting Inflow Rates	355
14.2.2 Forecasting Lake Volume	358
14.2.3 Prediction of Dam Failure Probability	359
14.3 Simulation of Dam Breaching and Flood Routing	361
14.3.1 Simulation of Dam Breaching and Flood Routing in Stage 1	362
14.3.2 Simulation of Dam Breaching and Flood Routing in Stage 2	363
14.3.3 Simulation of Dam Breaching and Flood Routing in Stage 3	365
14.4 Evaluation of Flood Consequences	365
14.4.1 Methodology	366
14.4.2 Calculated Dam Break Flood Consequences	367
14.5 Dynamic Decision-making	370
14.5.1 Methodology	370
14.5.2 Dynamic Decision-making in Three Stages	371
14.6 Discussions	374
14.6.1 Influence of the Value of Human Life	374
14.6.2 Influence of Failure Mode	374
14.6.3 Sensitivity of the Minimum Expected Total Consequence	375
 PART IV APPENDIXES: DAM FAILURE DATABASES	 377
Appendix A: Database of 1443 Cases of Failures of Constructed Dams	379
Appendix B: Database of 1044 Cases of Failures of Landslide Dams	419
References	452
Index	474