Lessons Learned from the Failure of Teton Dam

Abstract: The failure of Teton Dam in June 1976 had a significant impact on the dam engineering profession around the world. The failure resulted in the loss of 14 lives caused at least $500 million in damages. The dam was designed and constructed by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, one of the premiere engineering organizations in the world. The Teton failure and others in the same time frame, lead to the creation of the National Dam Safety Program. The failure has been extensively studied and the presentation will review the geotechnical aspects of the failure as well as the organizational structure that also had a part in the failure. The failure initiated a cultural shift in the dam engineering profession in the United States and around the world.

About the Speaker: David B. Paul, P.E., is Managing Partner of Paul GeoTek Engineering LLC, Denver CO. He retired from the US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) at the end of 2018 after 42 years of Federal service, as the Dam Safety Officer for the Mosul Dam Task Force which provided technical assistance to the Government of Iraq in to mitigate dam safety issues associated with Mosul Dam. He also served as Special assistant for Dam Safety at the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) headquarters in Washington, D.C., responsible for managing the USACE’s portfolio of 715 dams. He is a national specialist on critical infrastructure design, dam design, levee design, construction engineering, engineering risk assessments, interim risk reduction measures (IRRM), and dam and levee safety modifications. He recently participated in the Risk Assessment for Oroville Dam in California which is the tallest earth dam in the United States. He has been involved in the design and construction of 10 new dams and over 75 dam modifications around the world. Mr. Paul is currently a Trustee of the Deep Foundations Institute and a member of the United States Society of Dams (USSD), Association of State Dam Safety Officials (ASDSO) and American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE). He is DFI Trustee for the Seepage Control and Grouting Committee and serves as Chairman of the USSD Committee on Construction and is also active with the Embankment Dams Committee. He is the USSD Representative to the International Commission on Large Dams (ICOLD) Embankment Dams Committee.