

Dam Safety- Fact Sheet

Montana Watercourse and Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation
Water Resources Division

Outlet Erosion Control

Fact Sheet: 17



Erosion caused by the outlet of fast moving water can become a big problem without a proper guard against erosion. Failure to properly design, install, or maintain a stilling basin could lead to problems such as undermining of the spillway and erosion of the outlet channel and/or embankment material. These problems can lead to failure of the spillway and ultimately the dam. A stilling basin provides a means to absorb or dissipate the energy from the spillway discharge and protects the spillway area from erosion and undermining. An outlet erosion control structure such as a headwall/endwall, impact basin, United States Department of the Interior, Bureau of Reclamation Type II or Type III basin, baffled chute, or plunge pool is considered an energy dissipating device. The performance of these structures can be affected by the tailwater elevation. The tailwater elevation is the elevation of the water that is flowing through the natural stream channel downstream during various flow conditions. A headwall/endwall, impact basin, Type II or Type III basin, and baffled chute are all constructed of concrete. Concrete structures can develop surface and structural defects that can threaten the function of the control structure (See Fact Sheet # 11).



Concrete Headwall

Headwall/Endwall

A headwall/endwall located at or close to the end of the discharge conduit will provide support and reduce the potential for undermining. A headwall/endwall is typically constructed of concrete, and it should be founded on bedrock or have an adequate foundation footing to provide support for stability. A headwall/endwall can become displaced if it is not adequately designed and is subject to undermining. Displacement of the headwall/endwall can lead to separation of the spillway conduit at the joints which could affect the integrity of the spillway conduit. If a concrete structure develops the structural defects, or if the discharge spillway conduit does not have a headwall/endwall, then a registered professional engineer should be contacted to evaluate the stability of the outlet.



Impact Basin

Impact Basin

A concrete impact basin is an energy dissipating device located at the outlet of the spillway in which flow from the discharge conduit strikes a vertical hanging baffle. Discharge is directed upstream in vertical eddies by the horizontal portion of the baffle and by the floor before flowing over the endsill. Energy dissipation occurs as the discharge strikes the baffle, thus, performance

is not dependent on tailwater.

U.S. Department of Interior, Bureau of Reclamation Type II and Type III Basins.

Type II and Type III basins reduce the energy of the flow discharging from the outlet of a spillway, and allow the water to exit into the outlet channel at a reduced velocity. Type II energy dissipators contain chute blocks at the upstream end of the basin and a dentated (tooth-like) endsill. Baffle piers are not used in a Type II basin because of the high velocity water entering the basin.



Baffled Chute

Baffled Chute

Baffled chutes require no initial tailwater to be effective and are located downstream of the control section. Multiple rows of baffle piers on the chute prevent excessive acceleration of the flow and prevent the damage that occurs from a high discharge velocity. A portion of the baffled chute usually extends below the streambed elevation to prevent undermining of the chute. If any of the severe problems associated with concrete that are referenced in the opening paragraphs are observed, a registered professional engineer should be contacted to evaluate the stability of the outlet.

Plunge Pool

A plunge pool dissipates energy as the discharge flows into the plunge pool. Plunge pools are commonly lined with rock riprap or other material to prevent excessive erosion of the pool area. Discharge from the plunge pool should be at the natural streambed elevation. Typical problems may include movement of the riprap, loss of fines from the bedding material and scour beyond the riprap and lining. If scour beneath the outlet conduit develops, the conduit will be left unsupported and separation of the conduit joints and undermining may occur. Separation of the conduit joints and undermining may lead to failure of the spillway and ultimately the dam. A registered professional engineer should be contacted to ensure that the plunge pool is designed properly.



Plunge Basin

For more questions, comments, additional fact sheets, and area specific information you can contact DNRC or Montana Watercourse at the addresses below or on the web.

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