Research and Development Thesis

Assessing the risk of a large hydropower dam failure

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Abstract: Dam break analysis is an area of ongoing, extensive research. As the energy sector shifts to incorporate safe and sustainable sources for a growing global population, there is an increasing focus on low carbon technologies, hydropower being one of them. Hydropower dams are frequently constructed upstream of population centres, imposing risks to inhabitants downstream.

The goal of the following study is to combine the flow characteristics of ten unique dam break scenarios with empirical modeling principles to estimate associated loss of life. The results will contribute to a comparative risk assessment of the hydropower energy chain.

A two-dimensional model for a large hydropower dam is developed to simulate the ten dam break scenarios. Three empirical formulas with varying calculation methods are used to estimate loss of life. The results are compared to find the method which realistically summarizes the number of fatalities for each dam break scenario. The risk analysis is enhanced by estimations of the probability of failure on the individual dam.

Keywords: hydropower dam failure, hydraulic modeling, risk analysis, probability of dam failure, flood hazard
PREFACE

This research thesis has been submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the MSc. program entitled: EuroAquae Hydroinformatics and Water Management. The program is sponsored by the European Commission and consists of three course based semesters at a combination of the following participating universities:

- Newcastle University (Newcastle Upon Tyne, UK)
- Technical University of Catalonia (Barcelona, Spain)
- University of Nice – Sophia Antipolis (Nice, France)
- Brandenburg University of Technology (Cottbus, Germany)
- Budapest University of Technology and Economics (Budapest, Hungary)

The fourth and final semester of the program involves a research thesis. The thesis was carried out during a three month internship at the Paul Scherrer Institut located in Villigen, Switzerland. The following thesis will contribute to the long-term project on “Comprehensive Assessment of Energy Systems” launched by the Paul Scherrer Institut (PSI) and the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology (ETH) in Zurich.

AFFIDAVIT

I confirm that I have written the following thesis on my own. I have not made use of any sources and means other than those stated and cited. This thesis has not been handed into any university or educational institution, other than the EuroAquae consortium and the Paul Scherrer Institut.

Gabrielle Hosein
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