

SEPTEMBER 7, 1976

Office of the White House Press Secretary

NOTICE TO THE PRESS

The President has signed S. 3542 -- Teton Dam disaster assistance. This bill authorizes the Secretary of the Interior to make compensation for damages arising out of the failure of the Teton Dam in Idaho.

The Teton Basin Project was authorized on September 7, 1964, under Public Law 88-583, as a Federal reclamation project to provide supplemental irrigation water, hydroelectric power, flood control, and recreation and wildlife benefits. On June 5, 1976, while the reservoir was filling for the first time, the crest of the dam's embankment fell, breaching the dam and releasing 251,000 acre feet of water over a five-hour period.

The bill will provide express statutory authority, in addition to the existing appropriations act authority, for the Secretary of the Interior, without regard to the proximate cause of the failure of the Teton Dam, to fully compensate all persons who suffered death, personal injury, or loss of property as a direct result of the dam failure on June 5, 1976. S. 3542 will require:

- a limit on compensation equalling the pecuniary injuries or losses involved (no interest payments or punitive damages);
- the reduction of awards by an amount equal to the total amount of insurance benefits (excluding life insurance);
- a determination, within one year of filing, of the amount of a claim (advance or partial payments would be authorized);
- coordination of the program with other disaster relief operations conducted by other Federal agencies; and,
- the Secretary of the Interior to repair and restore irrigation facilities damaged as a result of the Teton Dam failure.

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