



US Army Corps
of Engineers

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers:

Army Strong - Engineer Ready

FACT SHEET

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Key levee terms and definitions

Levee: an earthen embankment, floodwall, or structure along a water course whose purpose is flood risk reduction or water conveyance.

Corps authority: there is no single agency with responsibility for levee oversight nationwide. The Corps has specific and limited authorities for approximately 2,000 levees nationwide.

Local responsibility: the responsibilities of local levee partners are broad and include levee safety; land use planning and development; building codes and operations, maintenance, repair, rehabilitation and replacement of the levee.

Levee certification: the certification of levees for FEMA's National Flood Insurance Program is the responsibility of the local levee owner or sponsor.

Types of levees:

- **Federally authorized levee:** designed and built by the Corps then turned over to a local sponsor to operate, maintain, repair and replace the levee.
- **Non-federally authorized levee:** designed and built by a non-federal agency, which is responsible for the operation, maintenance, repair and replacement of the levee.
- **Private or corporate-owned levee:** the Corps has no responsibility for private or corporate-owned levees.

Overtopping: water levels exceed the crest elevation of a levee and flow into protected areas. Levee may be damaged but not compromised. Flooding occurs from overflow/overwash (waves) and other sources. The levee must be inspected.

Overtopping breach: a breach whose cause is known to be a result of overtopping (system exceeded). The levee has been compromised after overtopping and must be repaired to function prior to the next event.

Breach: a rupture, break or gap whose cause has not been determined.

Failure breach: a breach for which a cause of failure is known based on an investigation to determine the cause.