

# News Release



*Defense Threat Reduction Agency  
U.S. Strategic Command Center for Combating Weapons of Mass Destruction  
Standing Joint Force Headquarters for Elimination*

On the Web: [www.dtra.mil](http://www.dtra.mil)  
Media Contact: 1 (703) 767-5870

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## **SEISMIC TEST DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT FINDS LITTLE TO NO IMPACT NEAR FORMER TETON DAM SITE**

A draft environmental assessment (EA) concerning a planned seismic experiment has been found to have little to no significant impact on the environment in and around the proposed test site near the former Teton Dam east of Sugar City, Idaho. The draft EA and Notice of Availability is being released for public comment on the Defense Threat Reduction Agency's website at <http://dtra.mil/Info/FOIA/ElectronicReadingRoom/FrequentlyRequestedDocuments/CurrentEvents.aspx>. The Department of Defense worked extensively with other federal, state, local and tribal officials to ensure every possible aspect was considered, and that there were no negative impacts to the environment.

This routine geological experiment – a small underground explosion – is part of a larger U.S. government project to gather information on how shock waves move through different types of rock. The data collected during this experiment will help the DoD's Defense Threat Reduction Agency (DTRA) more accurately model the speed and direction of seismic waves in different types of rock and soil.

This small-scale test will use conventional explosives, multiple seismic sensors and several nearby cameras surrounding the explosion to capture the data during the experiment. Shock waves travelling through the soil will provide DTRA with priceless data on how this particular type of rock affects seismic signals. This experiment:

- will not affect the former dam site
- will not affect wildlife in and around the area
- will not affect the river or groundwater
- will not pollute or contaminate the environment
- will not affect any historical or cultural sites
- will not impact the population, local towns, or structures

This routine scientific experiment will follow the strictest environmental standards before, during and after the test, and will only temporarily disturb animals due to preparation of the test site and the ground shock when the underground explosion is set off. Holes drilled for the placement of sensors and the explosive charge will be filled in after the experiment, and the land will be reseeded to return it to its natural condition.

The full Environmental Assessment, Seismic Experiment at the Teton Dam Site, is on the DTRA website at <http://dtra.mil/Info/FOIA/ElectronicReadingRoom/FrequentlyRequestedDocuments/CurrentEvents.aspx>. The report includes detailed information about the experiment, the surrounding environment, correspondence with state and local agencies, and several detailed pictures and maps showing exactly where the test will take place and the location and arrangement of sensors, cameras and the closest towns and structures.

For any and all media queries, including questions about the Draft EA, please contact DTRA Public Affairs:  
DTRA Public Affairs  
8725 John J. Kingman Rd., Stop 6201  
Ft. Belvoir, VA 22060-6201  
(703) 767-5870 or (800) 701-5096  
Email: [dtra.publicaffairs@dtra.mil](mailto:dtra.publicaffairs@dtra.mil)

For anyone outside the media, if the full report does not answer any questions you may have or you wish to provide comments on the document, please send them to:

Mr. Jeffrey Thomas  
1680 Texas St. SE, Bldg 20363  
Kirtland AFB, NM 87117-5669  
Email: [TDTS@DTRA.MIL](mailto:TDTS@DTRA.MIL)

## FAQs

**How will this affect the former dam site or the river?** This seismic experiment will not affect the river or the former dam site. The explosion may rattle loose rocks nearby, but the experiment will not alter the terrain in any way.

**Is this a big explosion?** Relatively speaking, no; the explosive used is equal to about 190 pounds of TNT. If detonated on the surface, the average person might see and hear the explosion from miles away, but underground (approx. 80-100 feet below the surface) the explosion will be well-contained; shock waves in the immediate vicinity will likely be the only sign that the test has taken place.

**Why can't they do this experiment somewhere else?** While this particular type of volcanic rock exists in several western states, the volcanic tuff near the former Teton Dam has the best qualities (depth, consistency, porosity, exposure) for an experiment measuring seismic activity.

**Will this explosion create a crater or disturb the former dam site?** No; this is a relatively small charge, and the surrounding rock will contain the explosion. The shock waves will travel through the ground the same way earthquakes move through the earth. Loose rocks near the explosion may move, but this will not look anything like a "Hollywood" explosion.

**Why do they need to set off an explosion?** This experiment is specifically designed to capture data from an underground explosion. An explosion or other event on the surface would transfer or lose most of its energy to the atmosphere, but underground, all of the energy created by an explosion goes "into" the surrounding rock, creating the right type of seismic waves that can be accurately tracked and measured at set distances from the explosive charge.

**Are these experiments related to future projects at the dam site?** No; this is a one-time experiment chosen on the particular type of rock found here.

**Could the underground explosion set off an earthquake?** No; the USGS has indicated that there are no fault lines in the vicinity of the study area, and this is a relatively small explosion compared to other tests.

**Will the public be allowed access to the dam site during the work period?** During the site preparation, recreation will not be restricted at the spillway ruin, other than standard construction safety zones. On the day before and day of the experiment, recreational access to the spillway, canyon bottom, and southern portion of the dam site (left bank of the river) will be restricted. This closure of the Teton Canyon surrounding the dam site is only expected to be for two to three hours, on two or three days.