



## **The Buffalo Creek Disaster of 1972**

### **Event Details**

- Date: February 26, 1972
- Flood Type: Coal Waste Dam Failure
- FEMA Disaster ID: DR-367-WV
- Fatalities: 123
- Impacted Streams: Middle Fork of Buffalo Creek
- Location: Logan County, WV (All fatalities occurred here)

### **Mitigation Efforts**

- None: No structural flood mitigation measures were implemented before or after the event, as the cause was industrial negligence rather than natural hydrological conditions.
- Legal Actions: Civil lawsuits and state investigations followed. The Pittston Coal Company settled a class-action lawsuit for \$13.5 million in 1974, far less than the \$100 million originally sought.
- Policy Influence: The disaster helped spur reforms in dam safety regulations at both the state and federal level, but no physical interventions were made in the floodplain.

### **Risk and Impact Analysis**

- Flood Zone Classification:
  - 66.7% in Zone AE
  - 33.3% in Zone A (areas with no detailed flood study)
- Cause of Death:
  - 123 by drowning (100%)
- Fatality Locations:
  - Majority in residential homes swept away by the wave
  - Mass casualty areas where multiple family members perished together

### **Demographics of Victims**

- Age Groups:
  - 35 children (Ages 0–12)
  - 10 teenagers (Ages 13–19)
  - 33 young adults (Ages 20–39)



- 31 middle-aged adults (Ages 40–69)
  - 10 elderly (Ages 70+)
- Gender Distribution:
  - 65 female
  - 55 male
- Mass Casualty Events (52.9% of fatalities):
  - Entire families lost in a single household—numerous multi-generational losses occurred.
  - Some survivors recounted the water sweeping through with no warning, collapsing homes within seconds.

### Multimedia & Sources

- Sources:
  - <https://newspaperarchive.com/charleston-daily-mail-feb-28-1972-p-2/>
  - <https://newspaperarchive.com/charleston-daily-mail-mar-06-1972-p-5/>
  - *Buffalo Creek: Valley of Death* by Dennis Deitz
  - Images: Arch A. Moore Papers, WVRHC
  - Data: USGS