CITY OF TEMPE (STANTEC) / BRIDGESTONE
Andrew H. Y. Goh, P.E.
City of Tempe, Arizona
31 East Fifth Street
Tempe, Arizona 85281

Mr. Tim Lines, VP
Stantec Consulting
8211 South 48th Street
Phoenix, Arizona 85044

James Wheeler, CPA
Bridgestone Industrial Products America, Inc.
402 BNA Drive, Suite 212
Nashville, Tennessee 37217

TEMPE TOWN LAKE DOWNSTREAM DAM FAILURE

Date of Loss: July 20, 2010
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I. PROJECT SUMMARY

PROJECT ASSIGNMENT

On July 29, 2010, Stantec Consulting Services, Inc. acting on behalf of the City of Tempe, Arizona and Bridgestone Industrial Products America, Inc. requested SEA, Ltd. to investigate the July 20, 2010 failure, of the Tempe Town Lake Downstream Dam, in Tempe, Arizona. This investigation was assigned to the direction of Dr. Robert Carbonara, Senior Analyst, as SEA Project No. 153405.

SCOPE OF PROJECT

Specifically, SEA was requested to render, if possible, a professional opinion regarding the cause of the dam failure.

CONCLUSIONS

- The Tempe Town Lake Downstream Dam failure was the result of intra-carcass pressurization (ICP).

- The cause of the ICP was a combination of age of the dam and the environmental conditions in which it existed.
II. PROCEDURES

- On July 29, 2010, Dr. Carbonara visited and photographed the site of the dam failure in Tempe, Arizona.
- Sections of Dam Span No. 2 and Dam Span No. 3, were received at SEA on August 16, 2010.
- Samples from Dam Span No. 1, were received at SEA on August 24, 2010.
- Samples from Dam Span No. 2, were examined and photographed.
- The Tempe Town Dam pressure log, was reviewed.
- The “Technical Proposal on Bridgestone Rubber Dam for City of Tempe, Arizona - Rio Salado Town Lake Project,” dated October 28, 1996, was reviewed.
- Drawings of the location of the samples cut from Dam Span No. 2, were reviewed.
- As-Built drawings of the dam, were reviewed.
- News media accounts of the July 20, 2010 failure, were reviewed.
- Photographs of the Tempe Town Dam prior to and following the failure, were reviewed.
- A drawing of the cross section of the dam body typical construction, supplied by Bridgestone, was reviewed.

III. DISCUSSION

THE INCIDENT

On July 20, 2010, around 9:45 p.m. PST (21:45) Span No. 2 of the Tempe Town Lake Downstream Dam failed, releasing water from the Tempe Town Lake into the Salt River bed. Following this incident, the other three spans of the dam were deflated.

THE TEMPE TOWN DAM

The Tempe Town Lake Downstream Dan was constructed in 1998/1999, commissioned in June 1999 and Tempe Town Lake was open to the public on November 7, 1999. The dam consists of three ~22' high concrete piers located intermittently across the Salt River with an inflatable rubber bladder between each of the piers and between the end piers and the shore. The length of the bladder between the shore and the first pier on each side is ~180'. The length of the inner
two bladders is ~201'. The diameter of each bladder is 16' when inflated. The bladders are designated as Number 1, 2, 3, and 4 with No. 1 on the south shore and No. 4 on the north shore. The failure occurred in Bladder No. 2, the inner bladder nearer the south shore. Figure 1 shows the dam following the failure, arrow indicates failed dam span.

**FIGURE 1:** The dam following the July 20, 2010 failure, looking southeast from downstream. Arrow indicates failed dam span.
The bladders are made from eight layers of rubber that are bonded together into roughly rectangular sheets ~220' by ~25' by ~1" thick. Each bladder is made from two of these sheets. The sheets are joined along one of their long edges. This is an edge joint, not a lap joint, which forms a lip lengthwise along the dam and is configured into fins to direct the flow of water over the dam. The other long edges are brought together and mechanically fastened to one another and to the foundation that spans the river, by steel plates and bolts anchored into the foundation. Figure 2 shows the shape of the dam in cross section.

![Concrete Foundation](image)

**FIGURE 2:** Schematic of constructed dam.

The outer layer of both the top and bottom sheets of the bladders are made from a compound of natural rubber (NR), styrene butadiene rubber (SBR), and ethylene propylene diene monomer (EPDM) rubber. A portion of the bottom section of the outer layer is filled with ceramic chips. The inner layer of both the top and bottom sheets are made from a compound of NR and SBR. The six intermediate layers are made from nylon fibers coated with NR /SBR. These six nylon fiber layers act as reinforcements for the rubber dam. Figure 3 is a schematic of the typical bladder construction. Figure 4 is a photograph of the cross section of the Bladder No. 2.
**FIGURE 3:** Cross-section of bladder rubber.

**FIGURE 4:** Cross-section of Bladder No. 2. Arrow indicates location of the delamination.
THE CAUSE OF THE FAILURE

Portions of the failed Dam Span Bladder No. 2 were examined and photographed. **Figure 5** shows the location of the samples that were cut from the Bladder No. 2 and sent to SEA.

**FIGURE 5:** Location of bladder sections examined at SEA.
Analysis of the failed portions of the Dam’s Span Bladder No. 2 showed a delamination or separation of the layers of the rubber sheets. The area showing delamination has been worn smooth from the separated layers rubbing against each other, see Figure 6. The separation occurred between the 2-ply and 4-ply layers as seen in Figure 3. This separation is characteristic of Intra Carcass Pressurization (ICP). ICP is normally the result of an interior breach in the layers of rubber that make-up the carcass. In this case, the bladder carcass breach occurred near where the bladder made contact with the concrete apron. This is the location where the bladder curvature deviates from its “cylindrical” profile and flattens out on the foundation. This change in curvature is where the bladder flexes, much like the sidewall on an automotive tire. This flexure causes a constant back and forth motion resulting from the movement of the bladder caused by the force of the water against the dam. The back and forth movement within the bladder carcass can cause small internal tears which then become the accumulation location for any air that penetrates the carcass. The penetration of the carcass is a diffusion process that is governed by an Arrhenius-type equation shown below and in Figure 7:

$$D = D_0 \exp \left( \frac{-E}{kT} \right)$$

Where:
- $D =$ the diffusion rate in the carcass at temperature $T$
- $D_0 =$ the frequency factor (a constant)
- $E =$ the activation energy for diffusion
- $k =$ the Boltzman constant
- $T =$ the carcass temperature in $^\circ$K

FIGURE 6: Delaminated area of bladder (arrow).
The total amount of air that accumulates depends linearly on the time over which the diffusion takes place.

The penetration of air into the bladder rubber depends on both the carcass temperature and time. As the diffusion equation shows, the carcass temperature is the dominant factor since it has an exponential dependence, whereas, as noted above, time has a linear dependence.

As the air penetrates the bladder rubber and accumulates at the internal tears, it builds up pressure, i.e., ICP. Over time, this accumulated pressure causes the separation or delamination of the layers of rubber that make-up the bladder wall.

The delaminated area no longer has the strength and structure of the other areas of the bladder and acts as a preferential site for failure, analogous to a stress riser. Although the pressure inside the bladder was only ~6 psi, the hoop stress in the bladder was ~600 psi. Once the accumulated air caused a large enough area of delamination of the layers, i.e., the effective stress riser, the hoop stress became larger than remaining strength of the bladder.

The failure was the result of the age of the dam (time) and the environmental conditions (temperature) in which the dam existed. The age of the dam was over 11 years and the temperatures in the Tempe area are extremely high, often exceeding 100°F.
IV. SIGNATURES

SEA, Ltd. hereby certifies the expressed opinions and conclusions have been formulated within a reasonable degree of professional certainty. They are based upon all of the information known by SEA, Ltd. as of the time this report was issued, as well as knowledge, skill, experience, training, and/or education.

Report Prepared By:  
Robert S. Carbonara, Ph.D.  
Senior Analyst

Report Reviewed By:  
Nicholas E. Biery, Ph.D.  
Technical Consultant
Tempe Town Lake dam analysis released

Report concludes age and exposure weakened one of dam’s bladders

Tempe, Arizona – A section of the western dam at Tempe Town Lake gave way in July because of heat and sun exposure over 11 years, according to an examination of the cause of the failure.

Tempe and Bridgestone Industrial Products America commissioned SEA Ltd., a national materials testing laboratory, to evaluate and determine the likely cause of the July 20 failure of one of four rubber bladders that make up the lake’s western dam. As part of this process, in August, Bladder No. 2 from Town Lake was shipped to SEA’s Columbus, Ohio, location for testing. According to a report issued today by SEA, the Town Lake dam segment burst because its internal layers separated over the bladder’s 11-year life. The separation resulted from a combination of the age of the bladder and high temperatures in the Tempe area.

“Tempe accepts the result of the report and we are moving forward safely and positively,” said Assistant City Manager Jeff Kulaga. “When Bridgestone recognized that the bladders were deteriorating faster than expected, the city and Bridgestone had the foresight to work together to develop an agreement during the original 10-year warranty period to replace the western dam at no cost to Tempe.”
James Wheeler, Director of Operations and Finance for Bridgestone, said: “The jointly commissioned report confirms what Bridgestone said as early as 2007 about the climate conditions and the long-term effects the environment has had on the rubber bladders in Tempe.”

The four western dam bladders currently are being replaced under the lease agreement between the city and Bridgestone with new segments that were manufactured by Bridgestone and shipped to Tempe. Town Lake is expected to reopen in early November, in time for one of the city’s biggest annual events: the Ford Ironman Arizona on Nov. 21.

The replacement bladders will be shaded by a new pedestrian bridge over the western dam and water will be sprinkled onto the bladders from a system to be installed under the bridge. SEA experts have told the city the replacement bladders will last at least five years under those conditions. The bridge is expected to be completed in May.

During the five-year lease period, Tempe will evaluate the best technology for holding in the waters of Town Lake, while letting upstream flows pass safely through the Salt River bed. During this time, the city also will work out a funding arrangement and undertake design and installation of the longer-term technology.

Kulaga will be available by request between 2-5 p.m. today, Sept. 22, to offer further information about the report and the status of the city’s work at Town Lake. Call Kris Baxter (480-250-5198) to set up an opportunity.

Don Darden, Executive Director of Communications for Bridgestone, can be reached at 615-937-3367.

The report and other Tempe Town Lake information is available at www.tempe.gov/lake. Click on “Dam Replacement Information Here” on the top bar.

###
Tempe Town Lake dam collapse blamed on heat, age

by Derek Quizon - Sept. 23, 2010 12:00 AM
The Arizona Republic

Heat and age were the main causes of the July 20 Tempe Town Lake dam collapse, according to a report released Wednesday by an independent consulting agency.

In August, the city commissioned Ohio consulting firm SEA Ltd. to investigate the cause of the dam failure. Parts of the collapsed dam's rubber bladders were sent to the firm's laboratory to be tested.

Tempe split the $50,000 cost of the study with Bridgestone, the manufacturer of the bladders, according to city spokeswoman Kris Baxter-Ging.

The report concludes that the layers of the rubber dam began to separate because of a breach in a portion of the dam near the concrete apron. The breach worsened over time, and deterioration was made worse by "extremely high" temperatures in excess of 100 degrees, according to the report. The report does not say what caused the initial breach.

Tempe released a statement Wednesday saying it accepts the results of the study and has decided to move on. Assistant City Manager Jeff Kulaga clarified that the city is not saying it was responsible for the dam's failure but that it agrees with SEA's findings.

"We're moving forward to safely reopen the lake on time and on schedule," he said.

SEA's report contained no recommendations on a replacement dam, Kulaga said, because the company was not contracted for that purpose.

The results of the report have not changed plans for bladder replacement in November, but Kulaga said the city would "take into consideration the findings" of the report when making plans for a longer-term dam replacement.

Bridgestone, the manufacturer of the bladders, signed a warranty in 1999 guaranteeing the rubber bladders would last 10 years. In 2007, Bridgestone warned city officials that the dam was deteriorating faster than expected. The projected $14 million price to replace them made officials wary of replacing the bladders at the time.

Don Darden, a spokesman for Bridgestone, said the results of the study validated the company's assertions that heat was shortening the lifespan of the bladders.

"There was nothing surprising in the findings for us," he said.