

9/2002

Letters to the editor

Anti-Chalillo Ari!

Dear Editor,

Today we read a report of more dam bursts after heavy rains, this time in Mexico and Germany. In central Mexico, at least 11 people have died following the failure of two dams near San Luis Potosi and Zacatecas.

Rains in Europe have burst a dam near the city of Bitterfeld, 60 miles northwest of Dresden, threatening 16,800 residents, who are being evacuated. This follows a dam failure in Syria earlier this year which caused more than a dozen deaths.

Should Belize be next? This year's rains in Belize could have ended in tragedy on the Macal River, if Chalillo had been built.

No wonder Fortis' contract with the Government of Belize allows it to walk away from the dam with no liability by paying \$1, in case the dam fails and kills people. A report completed for the Canadian government in February by AMEC, which did the EIA for the Chalillo dam, finds that the consequences of a failure of the dam would be in the highest category, with floods 15 times higher than a failure at the Mollejon dam.

Probe International got this report after filing an Access to Information request in Canada. Belizeans should ask why this report was not made public in Belize, or included in AMEC's EIA.

As AMEC now knows, the geology of the dam site in the EIA was wrong and raises the risk that the dam could fail.

Dam failures kill, and so does bad engineering. Mr. Sukhnandan, if Fortis/BECOL really believes its dam is a good idea, then (1) tell Belizeans the truth about how much the dam will cost and (2) make the full engineering plans for the project, including all geological studies, available to the public now.

Sincerely,

Ari Hershowitz

Director, BioGems Project, Latin America

Natural Resources Defense Council

