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Former Milburnie Dam, Neuse River, North Carolina | Restoration Systems

# Low Head Dam Safety

## What is a low head dam?

A low head dam is a human-made structure that spans the full width of a river and is designed to allow water to continuously flow over it. These dams are typically less than 25 feet high and don't provide flood control.

## Are low head dams dangerous?

Low head dams are very dangerous. They earned the nickname “drowning machines” because they create a recirculating washing machine-like feature called a hydraulic at the base of the dam that does not allow people to swim out of it.

## What should I do if someone is caught in a low head dam?

If you see someone caught in a low head dam, call 911 immediately. DO NOT attempt to enter the water to help, you could also become a victim.

**Learn more**



**AmericanRivers.org/  
LowHeadDams**