



# Accident Database

## Report ID# 423

Help

1996-06-19

Date

Thomas Dickinson

Victim

29

Victim Age

Patapsco River

River

Near Ellicott City, MD

Section

Union Dam (8' high) United States Maryland, US

Location

Gage

High

Water Level

N/A

River Difficulty



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**Cause**  
Cause Code(s)

- Caught in Low Head Dam Hydraulic
- PFD Not Worn or Present

## Injury Type(s)

- Does not Apply

## Factors

- Inexperience
- Poor Planning
- One Boat Trip

Inexperienced

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Victim Experience Level

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Private

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Trip Type

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Raft

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Boat Type

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**Group Info**

Julie Wise

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Other Victim Names

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Reported

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Status

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## Accident Description

DESCRIPTION: On June 19, 1996 the Patapsco River, a popular Class II run near Ellicott City, Maryland, was bank-full following heavy summer rains. At 5:00 p.m. Thomas Dickinson, 29, and Julie Wise, 30, entered the river in an inexpensive vinyl raft. After 2 miles of flatwater they encountered the 8 foot high Union Dam. This dam was breached on river right by Hurricane Agnes in 1972 and the remaining sides are normally dry. At high flows the breach cannot carry all the water, so



enjoying themselves right until the end. Their bodies were found separately, several miles downstream.

SOURCE: Brian McKay; Bobbie Miller; and Fire Lieutenant Dale Gardner via email

.ANALYSIS: (Walbridge) The hydraulics around dams are deceptively dangerous. Summer high water always brings out inexperienced floaters who do not recognize the danger that dams pose

No PFD On June 19 the Patapsco River, a popular class II run near Ellicott City, Maryland, was bank-full following heavy summer rains. Reports from Brian McKay, Bobbie Miller, and Fire Lieutenant Dale Gardner tell the following tale: At 5:00 Thomas Dickinson and Julie Wise, both in their 20's, entered the river in an inexpensive discount store raft. After 2 miles of flatwater they encountered the 8' high Union Dam. This dam was breached on river right by hurricane Agness in 1972 and is normally dry. At high flows the breach cannot carry all the water, so the river backs up and flows over the face. The pair dropped over and were immediately caught by the hydraulic., The man surfaced and was pulled back five times! Witnesses reported that no PFD's were worn and that the couple was enjoying themselves right until the end, oblivious to the danger. Their bodies were found separately, several miles downstream



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