

Accident Database

Report ID# 485

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1998-04-15

Date

Sgt. Karl Kelly

Victim

0

Victim Age

White River

River

Near Bedford, IN

Section

Williams Dam United States Indiana, US

Location

7'over flood stage

Gage

High

Water Level

N/A

River Difficulty

Caught in Low Head Dam Hydraulic

Cause

Cause Code(s)

- **Caught in Low Head Dam Hydraulic**

Injury Type(s)

- **Does not Apply**

Factors

- **Failed Rescue**

Extensive Experience

Victim Experience Level

Commercial

Trip Type

Raft

Boat Type

Group Info

Other Victim Names

Reported

Status

Accident Description

On April 15, 1998 Sgt. Karl Kelly, an Indiana conservation officer with 28 years of experience, died during a swiftwater rescue training exercise at the Williams Dam on the White River. The river, near Bedford, IN , was running extremely high due to recent rains. Kelly's team was practicing a two-boat tether, a dam rescue technique. While attempting to recover the practice "victim", a floating throw bag, the lead boat stalled and swamped in the backwash and spilled the occupants overboard. Kelly was in the downstream, or backup, boat. After attempting to pull the lead boat clear of the hydraulic, he moved his motor-powered raft upstream, between the swamped boat and the dam, to attempt a throw-line rescue. The boat swamped, throwing Kelly into the water. He recirculated for some time in the hydraulic. Safety boats picked up everyone else quickly, but could not reach Kelly for some time. Once he was washed out, he was quickly recovered downstream. CPR was administered, and they did get a pulse back. Despite this, he died in the hospital two days later. Two other officers involved in the drill were also hospitalized.

SOURCE: International Game Warden Magazine via NY Conservation Officer Ben Bramledge

ANALYSIS: (Walbridge) Sgt. Kelly's action's, though courageous, was foolhardy. Dam backwashes are dangerous, and the whole aim of the two-boat tether is to keep rescuers clear of it. His actions were contrary to his training, and paid a fearful price.

On April 15th, the Indiana Dept. of Natural Resources (IDNR) was >> conducting swift water rescue training at the Williams Dam on the White >> River near Bedford, IN in south central Indiana. While practicing a >> two-boat tether, the tethered motorboat was sucked in, along with >> another boat. One man is in critical condition in a Louisville, KY >> hospital, two others were treated and released at

the Bedford hospital. >> The river was running 7-feet over flood. For some very dramatic photos >> and complete story see the Bloomington, IN Herald Times web site at >> Article on the newspaper web site today says that the conservation officer, who had been hospitalized, has passed away. Our thoughts and sorrows go out to his friends and family. Roger Lynn Safety Chair Colorado White Water Association. A New York Conservation Officer reports that on April 15 Sgt. Karl Kelly, an Indiana conservation officer with 28 years of experience, died during a training exercise at the Williams Dam on the White River near Bedford, Indiana.

Kelly was part of a team practicing a two-boat tether rescue. The lead boat stalled and swamped while attempting to recover the "victim", a floating throw bag, spilling the occupants overboard. Sgt. Kelly was in the downstream, or backup, boat. After attempting to pull the lead boat clear of the hydraulic, Sgt. Kelly moved his motor-powered raft upstream, between the swamped boat and the dam, to make the rescue. This was a terrible mistake; one that ran contrary to his training. His boat swamped, and he was caught in the backwash. Safety boats managed to rescue everyone else, but Kelly, although given prompt care, died in the hospital two days later. Two other officers were also hospitalized.



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