

New England District's Bridge Safety Program Monitors Nation's Vital Infrastructure

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The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers New England District's Bridge Safety Program is a vital public service that ensures the health of bridges throughout the six-state region.

The New England District has authority over 80 bridges within its inventory; 45 are open to public vehicle traffic, the most of any Corps District. John Kedzierski, District Bridge Safety Program Manager, leads a team that conforms with federal guidance, procedures, and standards; coordinates with Operations Branch to prioritize and fund any needed repairs and inspections; and maintains the District's Bridge Inventory System database.

"[W]e must ensure the safety and structural integrity of all the bridges within our inventory, and that all comply with current public law regarding bridge safety," Kedzierski said.

The United States has over 600,000 bridges, of which the Army Corps is accountable for 921. The Corps is responsible for ensuring those bridges are consistently inspected and kept in a state of good repair.

Every state and agency responsible for bridge safety adheres to the same national standards as defined by statute. The Federal Highway Act of 1968 initiated a national bridge inspection program that recognized the need for periodic and consistent bridge assessments. The first National Bridge Inspection Standards were developed in 1971, mandating public bridge owners to develop a program maintaining and monitoring their bridges.

In New England, the Bridge Safety Program is currently collaborating with the U.S. Forest Service on a demonstration project to paint the North Springfield Spillway Bridge in Vermont using a new paint and sealant system. The project is expected to prolong the service life of the overall paint system and maintain the bridge's structural integrity. If successful, the sealant and paint technology will be shared with other federal agencies.

"This project will demonstrate the overall effectiveness of this type of paint system. The data and information can then be shared with other federal agencies so they can also maintain their bridges in a cost-effective manner," said Kedzierski.

Working with Corps of Engineers national headquarters, Kedzierski recently secured funding from the Federal Highway Administration to make needed repairs at the Bourne and Sagamore Highway Bridges at the Cape Cod Canal in Massachusetts, and to the Choate Brook Bridge at the Everett Dam in New Hampshire. This is the third time within the last four years that the District has secured funding from the Federal Highway Administration for various aspects of the New England Bridge Safety Program.