

# If Calif. levees fail, impact would be global

By Nick Stockton, MSN

California's always been for dreamers. Dreams of gold brought the forty-niners. Easy seasons and expansive arable acreage brought farmers, dreaming of an agricultural paradise. Fame, natural beauty, and the hang-loose cultural mosaic have brought dreaming millions to the state where summer never seems to end.

The summer dream has become a nightmare drought. But the years-long dry spell isn't what keeps engineers, economists, and state water planners awake at night. No, they worry about the network of levees at the crux of California's plumbing—a massive freshwater confluence called the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta.

Most of the state's water is drawn from the Delta, protected by levees that pretty much amount to mounds of dirt, even when compared to infrastructure that infamously failed New Orleans during Hurricane Katrina. Hurricanes don't hit NorCal, but these levees are alarmingly susceptible to disaster. If enough were to breach—in an earthquake perhaps, or severe El Niño storm—sea water from San Francisco Bay could rush in, tainting the water supply serving two-thirds of the state. The worst-case scenario could cause up to three years of severely curtailed water for most Californians.

Even if you're not a California dreamer, this affects you. Delta water keeps Hollywood in the movie business, Silicon Valley in the tech business, and 750,000 acres of farmland in the business of producing half of America's veggies, fruits, and nuts. If the levees go, so goes the water for 25 million residents of the world's seventh largest economy.

**Read the whole story**