

# Three Gorges Dam Set to Displace 100,000

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About 100,000 people living in the Three Gorges Dam area could be relocated over the next three to five years with massive landslides and bank collapses expected to hit the area, a government official said Tuesday.

The prospect of controlling or preventing geological disasters in the near future was not promising, Ministry of Land Resources official Liu Yuan told China National Radio.

The water level at the Three Gorges Dam was brought extremely close to its 175-meter capacity in trials in 2008 and 2009 and reached the maximum level in 2010.

The maximum level would enable the dam to fulfil its functions of flood control and generate electricity to the fullest extent.

But that would pose an increase in geological risks over the next three to five years, CNR reported.

After the water levels were raised, there were 70 percent more landslides and bank collapses in the area than had been predicted, Liu said, adding that an increasing number of monitoring sites were seeing adverse effects from the maximum water level.

"We will start to deal with the rock falls and landslides at 335 sites and call for people to work together to monitor the 5,386 potential danger sites. We also need to replace the affected monitoring sites and displace about 100,000 residents," Liu told CNR.

Many experts had opposed the Three Gorges project because they believed it would destroy rare species in the Yangtze River and ruin historic towns. But those fears were set aside as the authorities pressed on with the dam in order to address electricity shortages and better control floods.

However, criticism grew after more than 5 million people were displaced or affected by floods in east and south China last year, while the worst drought in 50 years plagued Hubei, Anhui and Jiangsu provinces, in the middle and lower reaches of the river.

Wang Jingquan, deputy inspector of the flood control and drought relief office affiliated to the Yangtze River Water Resources Committee, admitted last June that the project had failed to consider its full impact on the environment.

In January, China's environment ministry told hydropower developers they must "put ecology first" and pay strict attention to the impact on local rivers and communities.

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