



ON CUE WITH DEQ DRINKING WATER

By Bill Reed, Program Coordinator, Drinking Water
Section Arizona Department of Environmental Quality, WQD



HOW READY IS YOUR WATER SYSTEM FOR THE UNEXPECTED?

Tips on How to Make Your Emergency Operations Plan and Emergency Response Plan for Bioterrorism Part of Routine Operations

It's common sense for a drinking water system to be as fully prepared as possible for any type of emergency regardless of whether it an intentional act of terrorism or a natural occurrence. Arizona community water systems should be ready for the unexpected with one or both of the following action plans in place -- the State-required Emergency Operations Plan (EOP) and the EPA-required Emergency Response Plan (ERP).

The EOP is mandated by the Safe Drinking Water Act of 1996. EPA regulations for Emergency Plans (Title 40, Chapter 1(D) Part 142, Subpart B) list requirements for emergency preparedness in case of natural disasters such as floods, fires, drought or earthquake. Arizona R184-116 requires that a community water system must detail steps to ensure continuation of service in certain emergency situations, and it also lists requirements for the EOP.

Passage of the 2002 Bioterrorism Act, which amends the Safe Drinking Water Act of 1996, mandates all community water systems serving more than 3,301 persons to complete and certify a Vulnerability Assessment (VA) and an Emergency Response Plan (ERP). (Public water systems serving less than 3,301 persons were provided guidance to voluntarily complete a VA and ERP.)

During the last two years all required Arizona systems have completed their VAs and ERPs. Systems serving less than 3,301 persons have also been eligible to attend ADEQ-sponsored workshops and could voluntarily report their VA and ERP status to the program coordinator. The State will continue to support these efforts with technical assistance and workshops. The focus must now turn to making sure these plans are up-to-date, addressing high risks identified in the VA, and working the plan.

THE VA AND ERP

The purpose of the Vulnerability Assessment was to assess the susceptibility of a water system to terrorist attack or other acts to intentionally disrupt the ability of the system to provide a safe and reliable supply of drinking water. To that end the VA addressed a variety of key conceptual and physical elements that provided the basis for ERP development.

Strategies for ERP development generally fall into three broad categories: Sound business practices, system upgrades and security upgrades. The following are thoughts to consider in your review of VAs, ERPs, and also EOPs.

TIPS FOR STRATEGIC IMPLEMENTATION

- Routinely update your ERP and your EOP. Make them consistent and complementary.
- Ensure responder contact information is updated and identifies who does what.
- Develop the ERP at least five years out. What needs to be done in year one, two or five? Adjust management and budget goals accordingly.
- Set priorities in terms of your five-year plan – For example, if a SCADA system is desired, what can be afforded this year that contributes to that goal?
- Work the spare parts inventory – valves, piping, system plant, any critical component.
- Create a planning matrix that allows you to rank priorities in terms of high and low risks; acceptable or unacceptable risks; short-and long-term risk reduction actions; and then cost-out each option. Select specific risk reduction actions prior to considering their costs.
- When prioritizing next steps, do the common sense actions that require little or no funding such as motion lights, cutting back vegetation, or improving response capabilities through coordinated communications, operational policies or procedures.
- Consider security improvements in light of other planned or needed improvements that may provide significant multiple benefits. For instance, improved treatment processes or system redundancies can both reduce vulnerabilities and enhance day-to-day operations.
- Since passage of the Bioterrorism Act, there has been a proliferation of monitoring and other water security devices. While this is positive and encouraging, it would be wise to sort through the myriad choices with reliable resources and contacts.



SECURITY INFRASTRUCTURE FUNDING

Reminder: Infrastructure and equipment-related security upgrades are eligible expenses for low-interest Drinking Water Revolving Fund loans from the Water Infrastructure Finance Authority (WIFA). Requirements, including ACC approval for regulated systems, are the same as for other loans. For further information call Tiffany Troidl, WIFA Communications Director, (602) 364-1314.

DEQ PROGRAM VA/ERP SUPPORT IN FY2005

In 2005 ADEQ/WQD will continue to provide technical assistance to community water systems that serve between 3,301 and 49,999 persons to help them further complete VAs and ERPs. Five one-day (8-hour) educational and training workshops are also planned. Each training features a special guest speaker, resource updates, and tabletop emergency simulation exercises. The workshops will be open to all public water systems regardless of size and all owners and operators of wastewater facilities.

Are you prepared for the unexpected? Polish your EOP and ERP and keep them up-to-date. They are key tools to protect your water system and customers in any emergency.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

www.epa.gov/safewater/security

For emergencies: ADEQ (602) 390-7894

VA & ERP Program Staff

Bill Reed: (602) 771-4638, wpr@azdeq.gov

Kathy Stevens: (602) 771-4653, kds@azdeq.gov