



EPA ACTIONS TO SAFEGUARD THE NATION'S DRINKING WATER SUPPLIES

The US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is working with other government agencies and water suppliers to ensure that the Nation's drinking water continues to be safe, even from terrorist attack. EPA is providing local water utilities with the best scientific information as well as technical training on conducting vulnerability assessments and enhancing emergency response plans should an attack occur. To further protect the Nation's drinking water supplies, EPA has set up a special task force to enhance protection efforts already underway. The task force will consider how EPA can support efforts by utilities to accelerate local vulnerability assessments and mitigation actions. The goal is to ensure that water utilities are undertaking the steps to understand vulnerable points and to mitigate the threat from terrorist attacks as quickly as possible. The task force will work to speed up the availability of new advanced materials being prepared by EPA and other federal agencies and private sector partners, that will be used in preparedness efforts.

Background

There are approximately 168,000 public water systems nationwide, requiring focused teamwork at the federal, state and local levels to protect drinking water supplies across the country. The responsibility for protecting the Nation's drinking water is shared by many. The Safe Drinking Water Act establishes a clear partnership between EPA and the states to protect drinking water supplies and sources. EPA sets national drinking water standards to protect public health and provides technical and financial support to states and drinking water suppliers. The states implement and enforce these safe drinking water standards and ensure that drinking water utilities deliver safe water to the tap.

While the threat of public harm from an attack on the Nation's water supply is small, EPA's goal is to ensure that drinking water utilities in every community in the United States have access to the best scientific information and technical expertise, assess each utility's vulnerability to a terrorist attack, improve security, and know the immediate steps to take should an attack occur. To accomplish these goals, EPA is working with state and local governments to enhance emergency response systems, and with other federal agencies to better understand the potential of biological and chemical contaminants. EPA also has established a centralized notification system, developed tools to help water systems assess vulnerabilities at their facilities, and provided water systems with guidelines to improve security. In addition, EPA has established the Water Protection Task Force to further protect the Nation's drinking water.

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Emergency Response System

EPA and others are prepared to respond to a drinking water emergency should an incident occur. Through existing procedures, EPA would work closely with the law enforcement community, the Department of Defense, the Federal Emergency Management Agency, the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, the states and the drinking water utilities to minimize the effects of an attack.

In addition, EPA is prepared to dispatch members of its extensive network of expert emergency response personnel to the scene to support local communities. These professionals have considerable experience and expertise in working with local, state and federal emergency officials and are prepared to help with monitoring and clean up. They also can provide access to expert advice on contaminants (both potential health effects and treatment).

Under the Safe Drinking Water Act, states are required to develop emergency response plans for natural and manmade disasters for the drinking water facilities under their jurisdiction.. Should an incident occur, a drinking water utility would activate its emergency response plan in conjunction with local law enforcement and state emergency officials. If needed, these plans provide for shutting down the system, notifying the public of any emergency steps they might need to take (for example, boiling water) and providing alternate sources of water. If called upon by the state, EPA assists in the response.

Information Sharing

EPA is working closely with world-renowned experts at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and US Department of Defense, and Department of Energy to better understand the potential of biological and chemical contaminants, their fate and transport within drinking water (from source water to distribution), ways to counteract such contaminants through water treatment, and related health effects of exposure. By studying these contaminants, EPA can keep water systems informed of potential threats and how these chemicals affect those who ingest them. Having access to the best scientific knowledge will help a water utility identify any vulnerabilities in its system and be prepared to respond should a biological or chemical agent be introduced into the drinking water supply as part of a terrorist attack.

Should an incident occur, EPA and the Association of Metropolitan Water Agencies has in place a notification system to quickly share information among drinking water providers, the law enforcement community, and emergency response officials. The Information Sharing and Analysis Center, developed through a public-private partnership with the Association of Metropolitan Water Agencies (AMWA) and the FBI, can be used to alert authorities and water system officials of threats, potential vulnerabilities, and incidents. EPA has devoted resources to improve this system to include a secure, web- based "Virtual Center" that can be accessed by all those who have responsibility to take action.

Technical Assistance and Training

Over the past few years, EPA has provided technical and financial assistance to promote preparedness. While many communities have already taken precautions to safeguard the drinking water supply, others need additional resources and training. The Presidential Decision Directive 63 issued in 1998 requires EPA to work with the drinking water industry to develop tools to identify and correct infrastructure vulnerabilities to terrorist and criminal attacks.

EPA, in conjunction with experts from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and Department of Defense, Department of Energy, and the Federal Emergency Management Agency, has developed in-depth tools to help water systems assess vulnerabilities in their systems, determine actions that need to be taken to guard against an attack, and enhance emergency response plans.

Beginning in Fall 2001, EPA, along with the American Water Works Association (AWWA) and the AWWA Research Foundation, will begin training managers and employees in advanced approaches to protecting drinking water systems.

In addition, states may provide Drinking Water State Revolving Fund assistance grants to public water supply systems to allow them to complete vulnerability assessments and contingency and emergency response plans. Funding is also available for many of the infrastructure improvements a water system would need to take to ensure security of its drinking water supplies.

For More Information

For your information, we have compiled the most frequently asked questions concerning the security of the Nation's drinking water. They can be found at www.epa.gov/safewater/security/secqanda.html

For more information, please visit EPA's safe drinking water web site at www.epa.gov/safewater on the Internet or contact the Safe Drinking Water Hotline at 1-800-426-4791. More information about EPA's involvement at the World Trade Center and Pentagon following the events of September 11, 2001 can be found on EPA's home page at www.epa.gov on the Internet.

PROTECTING THE NATION'S WATER SUPPLIES FROM TERRORIST ATTACK

People have grown understandably concerned about the safety of America's drinking water supply. It is a concern we all share and that is why EPA has been working hard with our partners in the drinking water industry to disseminate to America's water utilities useful information about steps they can take to protect the Nation's drinking water. Below are the frequently asked questions we have been receiving concerning drinking water safety.

PROTECTING THE NATION'S WATER SUPPLIES FROM TERRORIST ATTACK

Q: Is the Nation's drinking water supply safe from terrorist attack?

In general, the threat of contamination of drinking water through terrorist activities is small. Most contaminants would need to be used in very large quantities, thereby minimizing an actual threat. Treatment processes already in place will deactivate many contaminants. Also, following the tragic events of September 11, 2001, drinking water utilities across the nation were alerted about the need to increase security and have augmented surveillance and protection measures.

Q: What kinds of threats or terrorism are there to drinking water?

The primary threats to the Nation's drinking water supplies are contamination by chemical, biological or radiological agents; damage, destruction, or sabotage of physical infrastructure; and disruption to computer systems. Generally, biological agents considered to be weapons of mass destruction pose the most danger in aerosol form (i.e. direct exposure to pathogens transported in the air).

Q: What is EPA doing to protect the drinking water supply?

EPA is working in partnership with state and local governments to protect the Nation's drinking water supply from terrorist attack. Under Presidential Decision Directive (PDD) 63, issued in May 1998, EPA was designated as the lead agency for the water supply sector. The following is a brief description of the activities that have taken place since that directive.

- In September 1998, the Agency established a public/private partnership with water-related organizations and subsequently appointed Diane Van de Hei, executive director of Association of Metropolitan Water Agencies (AMWA), as the water sector liaison to the federal government on critical infrastructure.
- Over the past several years, EPA and its partners have developed training for utilities on how to assess vulnerabilities, determine what actions need to be taken to guard against attack, and develop emergency response plans.

- In October 2001, Water Protection Task Force was established to ensure that activities to protect and secure water supply infrastructure are comprehensive and are carried out expeditiously.
- In October 2001, EPA disseminated to America's water utilities useful information about steps they can take to protect their sources of supply and their infrastructure. Working with the FBI, EPA also sent notice to local law enforcement agencies asking them to work closely with their local water utilities to provide extra security.
- EPA is working with Sandia National Labs and AWWA to develop training materials for water companies to help them conduct thorough assessments of their vulnerabilities.

Q: Is bottled water safer than water from my tap?

Bottled water is not necessarily safer from terrorist attack than your tap water. Bottled water is valuable in emergency situations (such as floods and earthquakes), and high quality bottled water may be a desirable option for people with weakened immune systems. In most cases, bottled water comes from a water source just like water from your tap. The safety of bottled water depends on the safety and emergency response plans in place at the bottling plant. Tap water is protected at the drinking water facility through local security measures advocated and supported by EPA, state and local governments, as well as state and local-based water organizations.

Q: Will boiling water help?

Boiling water is effective in removing certain contaminants. When microorganisms, like those that indicate fecal contamination, are found in drinking water, water suppliers may be required to issue boil water notices. Boiling water kills these organisms that can cause disease. However, boiling water containing certain contaminants, such as lead and nitrate, will increase the concentration and the potential risk. It is best to check with your local water utility or health department to determine if boiling water is necessary.

Q: Could a small drop amount of biological or chemical agent introduced into a source of drinking water contaminate a whole city's drinking water supply?

Not likely. Over the years, EPA, with other federal experts at the Centers for Disease Control and the Department of the Army, have studied chemical and biological threats to water. We have consistently found that it would take very large amounts of a contaminant to threaten the safety of a water system. Because of increased security at water reservoirs and utilities around the country – and because people are being extra vigilant as well – it would be difficult for someone to introduce the quantities needed to contaminate a system without being detected. In addition, should a contaminant be introduced, the treatment system already in place for treating drinking

water before it comes out of the tap will, in many cases, remove the immediate threat to public health.

Q: If a terrorist attack on my water supply is carried out, how will I know? Will I be able to tell if my water is contaminated?

In the unlikely event of an attack on your local water system, the drinking water utility would activate its existing emergency response plan with local law enforcement and state emergency officials. These plans provide for shutting down the system, notifying the public of any emergency steps that need to be taken, like boiling water, and providing an alternative source of water, if needed. Follow the advice of your water supplier if you receive notice of a threat.

Q: What should I do if I see someone or something around my drinking water supply that looks suspicious?

As soon as possible, contact your local enforcement authorities, or 9-1-1, to report a suspicious event, or if you witness a perceived terrorist activity. Remember, the more facts that you can provide, the quicker the response time. Please, be prepared to provide detailed information to help the authorities as much as possible.

Q: Where can I get more information?

- **Drinking Water Basics** (<http://www.epa.gov/safewater/dwhealth.html>)
- **More Frequently Asked Questions** (<http://www.epa.gov/safewater/faq/faq.html>)
- **Local Drinking Water Information** (<http://www.epa.gov/safewater/dwinfo.htm>)
- **Safe Drinking Water Web Site** (<http://www.epa.gov/safewater/>)
- **Safe Drinking Water Hotline** 1-800-426-4791
- **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention** (<http://www.cdc.gov>)

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Consent Communication #3

A communication was received
from the United States
Environmental Protection Agency,
regarding actions to safeguard the
Nation's drinking water supplies.

In City Council November 19, 2001

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