

### BACKGROUND



The mission of Water/Wastewater Agency Response Networks (WARN) is to provide expedited access to specialized resources needed to respond to and recover from natural and human caused events that disrupt public and private drinking water and wastewater utilities.

Unlike existing statewide mutual aid agreements, WARN membership is open to both public and private utilities. By adopting the WARN approach to mutual aid and assistance, drinking water and wastewater utilities in each state are able to sign a single agreement covering issues such as indemnification, workers' compensation, and reimbursement. The agreement also allows for utilities to share equipment, personnel, and other resources to respond effectively to any crisis.

A WARN's success relies on a strong base of member utilities willing to help one another during emergencies. For this reason, no utility is too large or too small to benefit from WARN, and each additional member enhances the probability of a successful response to an emergency.

### ROLE OF SMALL SYSTEMS IN WARN

Every existing WARN includes small systems as members and all member utilities have equal rights, regardless of size. Small systems are eligible to serve on the various WARN committees and subcommittees, as well as serve as the WARN Chair, if elected to the position. Small systems, like all members, can request or send resources during an emergency, but are not obligated to do so if they decide not to for any reason.

Existing WARNs have found that small systems are typically best prepared to respond to other small systems' requests, since they are more familiar with the equipment used at small systems. Additionally, personnel and equipment from small systems can be pooled into a combined team to assist larger systems, if needed.

### WATER SECTOR SUPPORT

Eight major water organizations signed the *Joint Policy Statement on Mutual Aid and Assistance Networks* in February 2006, encouraging utilities and local/state governments to establish intrastate mutual aid and assistance networks. Among the signatories, the National Rural Water Association (NRWA) committed to the "Utilities Helping Utilities" concept and encourages its members to discuss mutual aid and assistance with their peers. The Rural Community Assistance Partnership (RCAP) has also provided outreach support to the development of WARNs across the nation.

Additional support is available through outreach products developed by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to aid utilities in the development of mutual aid and assistance networks, found at: [http://cfpub.epa.gov/safewater/watersecurity/home.cfm?program\\_id=8#maa](http://cfpub.epa.gov/safewater/watersecurity/home.cfm?program_id=8#maa)

## SMALL SYSTEMS' INVOLVEMENT IN WARN RESPONSES

### Responding to Requests for Assistance

- City of Alamosa, Colorado, Water Contamination Incident (2008) – Colorado WARN response consisted of 23 utilities and the NRWA providing incident management and sampling expertise, as well as resources for flushing and disinfecting the water system.
- Hurricanes Umberto and Ike (2007-2008) – Texas WARN response included small systems locating generators and coordinating support to utilities who lost power.
- Southern California Fires (2007) – California WARN response included small systems providing resources such as operators, mechanics, electricians, water quality technicians, water buffaloes for firefighting, and bottled water for affected citizens.
- Hurricanes Katrina and Rita (2005) – Florida WARN response included small systems who cleaned electrical components and lift stations, fixed electrical motors and pumps, and repaired water main leaks.

### Requesting Assistance

- City of Alamosa, Colorado, Water Contamination Incident (2008) – City of Alamosa's water system responded to a *Salmonella* outbreak and received aid from small systems through Colorado WARN.
- Hurricane Katrina (2005) – Hundreds of small systems requested assistance through Florida WARN and received support from 14 different member utilities.

## COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT WARN

FALSE	TRUE
WARN is geared toward larger systems.	➤ Small systems and large systems have equal rights in every existing WARN.
Small systems do not have enough resources to respond to requests for assistance.	➤ Resources and personnel from small systems have been used in past WARN responses and can be pooled to meet large requests.
WARN membership is too expensive for small systems to participate.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Existing WARNs do not require a membership or retainer fee.</li> <li>➤ All member utilities volunteer time to develop and maintain their WARN.</li> </ul>
Putting the WARN agreement through legal review is cost-prohibitive.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ In existing WARNs, legal experts from small and large systems have already reviewed the agreement and additional review may not be necessary.</li> <li>➤ Some states' Attorney Generals have reviewed the WARN agreement and many small systems do not feel the need to complete an additional legal review.</li> </ul>
WARN membership obligates small systems to send resources.	➤ No member is obligated to send resources if they decide not to for any reason.
WARN membership precludes small systems from participating in other mutual aid and assistance agreements or utilizing resources from contractors or associations.	➤ WARN recognizes the need for member utilities to also access local agreements and statewide programs, and does not attempt to replace them.

## FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Contact John Whitler of EPA ([whitler.john@epa.gov](mailto:whitler.john@epa.gov)) or visit:  
[http://cfpub.epa.gov/safewater/watersecurity/home.cfm?program\\_id=8#maa](http://cfpub.epa.gov/safewater/watersecurity/home.cfm?program_id=8#maa).