RCAP Offers Security Toolbox

The Rural Community Assistance Partnership (RCAP) now offers a resource to help small water and wastewater systems improve their security and prepare for disasters and other unforeseen events. The *Security and Emergency Response Planning Toolbox for Small Water and Wastewater Systems* consists of five core modules plus appendices:

1. a simple and practical vulnerability assessment (VA) guide for small water systems, which is also applicable to wastewater systems;
2. emergency response planning (ERP) instructions for small drinking water systems;
3. an emergency response planning template for small drinking water systems;
4. emergency response planning instructions for small wastewater systems; and
5. an emergency response planning template for small wastewater systems.

The instructions demonstrate how to conduct the procedures, and the templates are blank and identical to the forms in the instructions. The templates may be printed and completed by hand or saved on a computer and filled in by typing into the saved document. The templates also contain a page to certify that the process has been completed.

In addition, the appendices include resources, a glossary, an emergency notification and contact list, and training presentations.

Some state agencies now require that small water and wastewater systems (those serving populations of 3,300 or fewer) certify completion of a VA and ERP. Certification of completing a VA and ERP is also a prerequisite for funding from the U.S. Department of Agriculture. RCAP's security toolbox is designed to be a simple, user-friendly resource that can help small systems meet these requirements and operate and manage their water and wastewater systems securely and efficiently.

For more information about the Security and Emergency Response Planning Toolbox for Small Water and Wastewater Systems *call RCAP at (888) 321-7227 or download a free copy of from their Web site at* www.rcap.org.

Diagram courtesy of snrs.unl.edu

Making Water Through Cloud Seeding

Arizona and six other states are considering a cloud-seeding program to help replenish water in the Colorado River. Within three years, officials hope to create more snowfall in the Upper Rockies so that the snowmelt will increase flow in tributaries.

Seeding, which injects chemicals such as silver oxide into clouds, allows water droplets or ice crystals to form more easily. An experiment in cloud seeding in Utah resulted in a 10 percent snowfall increase. The Arizona Department of Water Resources estimates that the project will cost between $1 to $20 per acre-foot of water, although they aren't sure where they will obtain funding.

Photo courtesy of Win Henderson / FEMA

USDA Funds $115 Million for Infrastructure

U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Secretary Mike Johanns announced $115 million for water and wastewater loans and grants at an April 21, 2006, press conference. The investment—$55.1 million in loans and $59.9 million in grants—will benefit 50 rural communities in 28 states.

The total includes $3.5 million in solid waste management grants, which are made to public and private nonprofit organizations for providing technical assistance and training to associations to reduce or eliminate pollution of water resources and improve planning and management of solid waste facilities.

Since 2001, USDA has provided loans and grants totaling more than $6.5 billion to assist with community water and wastewater infrastructure. Many of the 5,475 communities receiving the funding are struggling to address environmental concerns brought on by improper treatment of sewage or unsafe or unreliable water, and many are among our nation's poorest rural communities.

To learn more about USDA water and wastewater loans and grants, visit the USDA Rural Development Utilities Service Web site at www.rurdev.usda.gov/rus *or contact your state Rural Development office. For the phone number of your state Rural Development office, contact the National Environmental Services Center at (800) 624-8301 or (304) 293-4191. The list is also available on the Rural Development Web site at* www.rurdev.usda.gov/recd_map.html.

Concern for Environment Wanes

A Gallup poll of 1,000 adults taken March 13 through 16, 2006, shows that American's concern about environmental issues has decreased. Between 1990 and 2006, respondents who said they worried a great deal about drinking water pollution fell from 65 to 54 percent; concern for river, lake, and reservoir pollution fell from 72 to 51 percent; and toxic waste contamination dropped from 69 to 52 percent. The only issue that generated an increase during this time was global warming, which increased slightly from 35 to 36 percent of those polled.

NESC Reorganization Announced

Richard A. Bajura, executive director for the National Environmental Services Center (NESC) at West Virginia University, recently unveiled the NESC reorganization plan. "The new NESC will allow us to offer the same, quality drinking water and wastewater services for small communities with an eye to developing new services," Bajura said.

In addition to base funding from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Bajura has secured additional funds from the university to ensure the center's success and expansion. "WVU and NESC are committed to serving the nation's small communities by providing the most comprehensive information and training available about environmental infrastructure," he said.

NESC's new project management and development directors include Pam Schade who will focus on state projects, Clement Solomon who will manage the National Small Flows Clearinghouse (NSFC) and National Drinking Water Clearinghouse (NDWC) projects, and Graham Knowles who will manage the National Environmental Training Center for Small Communities (NETCSC) project.

NESC's new services managers include Jennifer Hause for Technical Assistance, Sandra Fallon for Educational Services, Trina Wafle for Communications, Jeanne Allen for Product Distribution, Vernon Deal for Information Technology, and Frank Saus for Finance and Administration.

The reorganization also includes a realignment of staff positions within the service units made necessary by the reduced federal appropriations that have affected small community programs across the country. The affected NESC employees are eligible to continue their employment with other WVU departments.

"We thank our sponsors and the university for their support throughout the transition," said Bajura. "Through prudent management of existing and new resources, not only are we sustaining our efforts to serve small communities, we plan to expand our services for the long term."

RDUS Loans: Poverty Rate Unchanged; Others Up

The Rural Development Utilities Service (RDUS) recently announced interest rates for water and wastewater loans. RDUS interest rates are issued quarterly at three different levels: the poverty line rate, the intermediate rate, and the market rate. Each has specific qualification criteria.

The rates, which apply to all loans issued from July 1 through September 30, 2006, are:

- poverty line: 4.5 percent (unchanged from the previous quarter);
- intermediate: 4.5 percent (up 0.125 from the previous quarter); and
- market: 4.5 percent (up 0.125 percent from the previous quarter).

RDUS loans are administered through state Rural Development offices, which can provide specific information concerning RDUS loan requirements and applications procedures.

For the phone number of your state Rural Development office, contact the National Environmental Services Center at (800) 624-8301 or (304) 293-4191. The list is also available on the Rural Development Web site at www.rurdev.usda.gov/recd_map.html.

EPA Has Water Monitoring Tools

In May 2006, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) released a set of multimedia products to help small drinking water utilities determine federal monitoring requirements and prepare water compliance samples under the Safe Drinking Water Act.

The tool kit features an interactive Web site— Rule Wizard—that provides a complete list of all of the federal monitoring requirements for a selected type and size of public drinking water system, such as a community water system serving 3,300 people using groundwater as a source of supply. A companion tool, the *Interactive Sampling Guide for Drinking Water Operators*, features a CD-ROM with a video and a slide presentation that illustrates proper sampling procedures, which users can download to their local computer. Case studies are also presented on the CD-ROM to help public water system owners and operators work with state and local agencies when contaminants are detected.

The Rule Wizard may be accessed at www.RuleWizard.org. *The CD-ROM is available online at* www.epa.gov/safewater/smallsys/samplingcd.html *or through the National Service Center for Environmental Publications at (800) 490-9198.*

Benzene Found in Soft Drinks

U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) tests have discovered benzene, a cancer-causing chemical, in soft drinks. Whether the level found in the beverages represents a health hazard is the topic of a debate between the FDA and the Environmental Working Group (EWG), a Washington D.C.-based research organization.

A 2003 FDA report, part of their ongoing "Total Diet Study," identified 79 percent of diet soda samples taken between 1995 and 2001 as having benzene above federal standards set for drinking water. The EWG has asked that the FDA require warning labels on soft drinks.

According to the FDA, a follow-up study found that the vast majority of the samples "contain either no detectable benzene or levels below the limit for drinking water and do not suggest a safety concern" and planned no immediate action on the matter.

"If they're so confident the situation is not a safety risk, they need to release the data to prove it," says Richard Wiles, EWG senior vice president in an April 6, 2006 Associated Press article. "The only data available to the public contradict their claim."

Benzene is an industrial chemical used to make plastics, rubber, detergents, and pesticides, and has been linked to leukemia. It forms in soft drinks when ascorbic acid (Vitamin C) and preservatives (sodium or potassium benzoate) interact, with heat and shelf life also playing a factor. U.S. Environmental Protection Agency classifies benzene as a human carcinogen and sets the maximum contaminant level for drinking water at five parts per billion.

For more information, visit the FDA Web site at www.fda.gov *and the EWG Web site at* www.ewg.org.

Richard A. Bajura serves as the National Environmental Services Center executive director. He also directs the National Research Center for Coal and Energy at West Virginia University where he has had broad oversight of NESC programs for more than two decades. (photo taken at National Small Flows Clearinghouse 25th Anniversary celebration.)