



Massachusetts  
Department  
of  
ENVIRONMENTAL  
PROTECTION

## fact sheet

# Emergency Response Planning at Public Surface Water Sources

Drinking water reservoirs and river intakes are particularly vulnerable to spills and accidental releases from public and private discharges; accidents related to vehicles, railroads, airports, boats; utility easements; fixed site releases at industrial and public facilities; inappropriate use of pesticides and fertilizers; improper disposal of household hazardous waste; and illegal dumping of a variety of substances. These potential sources of contamination can cause sudden, costly, and sometimes permanent harm to a public drinking water source.

Public water systems may take preventive measures to protect their sources from these unexpected releases. Here are some recommendations to pursue within the watershed.

### Plan Ahead - Prevention

#### **Develop a comprehensive emergency response plan**

Title III (Emergency Planning and Community Right-to-Know) of the Superfund Amendments & Reauthorization Act (SARA) of 1986 require each community to develop comprehensive emergency response plans. Water suppliers should review the existing plan to ensure that water supply sources are identified and that water system contact names and telephone numbers are correctly listed.

The emergency response plan should include copies of:

- Standard operating procedures (SOPs) in the event of spills or releases
- Regulatory notification requirements, such as what size spills are required to be reported;
- who to call, telephone numbers, and a list of what information is required to be reported;
- map of intakes, tributaries, watershed boundaries, adjacent public wells, and locations of sites where spills or accidental releases could occur.

As required under the Bioterrorism Act, a drinking water utility serving more than 3,300 persons must conduct a vulnerability assessment; certify to EPA that the assessment has been completed; submit a copy of the assessment to EPA; and show that the system has updated or completed an emergency response plan outlining response measures if an accident occurs. More information is available at <http://cfpub.epa.gov/safewater/watersecurity/bioterrorism.cfm>.

**Identify, map and distribute information** to local emergency responders regarding the locations of intakes on the river, tributaries, watershed boundaries, public wells adjacent to the river; a list of chemicals used at municipal, state, and industrial facilities in the watershed; locations of stormwater drains and the locations of known dams in the event that they can be manipulated by authorized individuals for contaminant control.

The fire department, board of health, planning board, local emergency planning committee (LEPC), and others may also have existing information to help with your

inventory. SARA requires companies to work with the LEPC if they handle certain hazardous chemicals in quantities above established thresholds.

**Develop a communication list** of contacts at upstream and downstream facilities, dams, as well as at other public water systems on or adjacent to the river. Notify owners and operators of these facilities about the location of your intake and request, in writing, that you be notified immediately in the event of a chemical spill or discharge. Take this opportunity to educate them about water supply protection.

**Provide comments** to municipal boards in other cities/towns in the watershed about proposed development, land use controls, best management practices (BMPs) for stormwater flow into tributaries, and other issues to avoid future problems. See MassDEP's *Project Awareness Protocol Fact Sheet* at <http://www.mass.gov/dep/water/drinking/surfwat.htm> for ideas.

**Post signs** along major roads in watershed which direct the public to call "911" or other local emergency number in case of spills. Be aware of accident-prone areas and transport routes of chemicals.

**Educate** the public, local officials, civil defense, local emergency response team, and businesses about water supply protection issues.

**Conduct household hazardous waste collection days.** Establish permanent collection sites away from sensitive watershed areas for used batteries, paints, motor oil, etc.

**Conduct drills** in coordination with local/regional response teams and businesses in the watershed to test the effectiveness of policies and procedures and to practice responding to various situations. Including local officials and staff, fire departments, boards of health, civil defense, school administration, businesses and others, in planning and implementing the drills will allow for several town or region-wide concerns to be addressed and tested at the same time. In the drills include issuing health advisories, conducting neighborhood and school evacuations, and evaluating the town's communication system (both making responders aware of the nature of the emergency and issuing advisories to the public when necessary via television, radio, and other news media), equipment, and emergency plan in general.

**Modify components** of the emergency response system as needed to improve effectiveness.

## Respond To Emergencies

Drinking water supply professionals responding to local emergencies need to be adequately prepared and trained, and know their roles and responsibilities. Here are some recommendations.

**Know regulatory reporting requirements** of state and federal agencies. Know who to call, telephone numbers, and what information to report.

**Know your role and responsibilities.** Have access to and be familiar with the emergency communication list, policies, and procedures for emergency response. Know when and how to safely handle spills or other events until first responders arrive on scene. Know what steps to take to avoid drawing contaminants into the water supply

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system Be familiar enough will local watershed characteristics to provide the incident commander with information and advice.

**Provide training and materials to responding staff.** Water supply staff including new employees should be adequately trained, have access to appropriate clean-up/response materials (storm drain covers, absorbent pads, booms, etc.), up-to-date policies, procedures, and communication lists to perform tasks for which they are responsible.

## Follow-Up

Several steps can be taken to ensure better preparedness in the event of future emergencies. Here are some recommendations.

**Provide follow-up reports** to the public on the resolution of the situation.

**Share information** learned from drills and real situations with other municipalities in order to better protect all public drinking water sources.

## Additional Information

For more information, visit MassDEP's web site at <http://www.mass.gov/dep/water/laws/policies.htm#dwguid> or call Kathy Romero at 617-292-5727.

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