
ENVIRONMENTAL Fact Sheet



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Emergency Planning for Public Water Systems

This document is written for members of community public water systems involved in emergency planning. The intent is to provide an initial outline for preparing an emergency plan for a public water system.

Emergency Planning for Public Water Systems

New Hampshire Administrative Rule Env-Ws 360.15 requires all community public water systems to have a formal emergency plan. These plans are action steps to follow should a source of drinking water become contaminated or any other component of the storage or distribution system becomes damaged or is at risk. Completion of an emergency plan is a significant endeavor, but one that can benefit the system and its users through emergency response preparedness, contingency planning, and source protection.

Rule Requirements

Env-Ws 360.15 replaces Env-Ws 365. The new rule requires that all community water systems submit a formal plan to DES once every six years. It further requires that the plan be reviewed annually by the system and updated as needed. Additionally, the plan will be subject to review during each sanitary survey, and lack of a current plan will be a survey deficiency.

Bureau Actions to Foster Emergency Planning

To aid water systems in preparing an effective emergency plan, DES has developed an Emergency Planning Guide, which is intended to help you understand and meet the basic standards for an emergency plan as set forth in Env-Ws 360.15. The guide illustrates the content and format of a basic plan. By following these guidelines, you are assured a thorough emergency plan.

The guide is available through the DES website at

http://des.nh.gov/organization/divisions/water/dwgb/wseps/emergency_planning.htm under Water System Security. Emergency planning tools developed by the Environmental Protection Agency are available at www.epa.gov/safewater/security.

Assistance In Plan Development

A plan that meets DES requirements should require minimal time and only in-house resources. Some systems may decide to develop, implement, or maintain their plans at a more advanced level. Technical assistance is available through the DES, Granite State Rural Water Association and RCAP Solutions, Inc.

Components of a Basic Plan include:

Chain-of-Command: to identify who is responsible for making decisions during an emergency and outline each person's responsibilities during an emergency.

Notification Procedures: to identify who will be contacted and how during an emergency , and details for boil orders, critical users and mutual aid agreements.

System Components: accurate, up-to-date information about a system's facilities, equipment, and design, plus a map showing key system features. This will facilitate repair during an emergency and help assess a system's vulnerability to emergencies.

Alternate Water Sources: discussions of how a system might obtain water from outside sources, or modify treatment capabilities to meet basic water needs during an emergency.

Alternate Power Supply: details regarding available alternate power supplies.

Water Use Restrictions: steps that could be taken to cope with losses of source capacity.

Return to Normal Operation: follow-up actions and staff responsibilities to return to normal system function.

Plan Readiness and Training: access to the plan, rehearsals and special staff training or certifications such as incident command system training.

Vulnerability Assessments

Although not required as part of the emergency plan, a vulnerability assessment should be performed by every water system. Some emergencies are caused by reasons beyond the control of the water system, such as floods, sabotage, ice storms, earthquakes, droughts and power outages. Other emergencies may be preventable. Age and obsolescence of equipment, lack of equipment, poor maintenance, poor system design, lack of spare parts, high risk or ill advised land usage near sources of water, and lack of source protection efforts are all preventable factors that can cause water system emergencies. Each system should assess its potential susceptibility to unpreventable and preventable emergencies and consider the impact of each identified vulnerable factor to the supply, storage, and distribution components of the system. Vulnerability assessments are further discussed in DES's emergency planning guide. Reducing a system's vulnerability to emergencies is a key element of any emergency plan.

Source Water Assessment Reports completed by DES and land usage information assembled for the chemical monitoring waiver program and/or other source protection efforts will help with this task. The town-wide Drinking Water Resource Maps DES has distributed to all New Hampshire towns is another helpful tool.

Practicing The Plan

For an emergency plan to be effective, the staff must have a clear understanding that management supports the plan. Systems should occasionally practice scenarios to evaluate actual system readiness. A practice scenario would be created and would then be acted out. The system should then evaluate staff actions and make any necessary changes to the plan to address observed problems.

For Additional Information

Please contact the Drinking Water and Groundwater Bureau at (603) 271-2513 or dwgbinfo@des.state.nh.us or visit our website at

<http://des.nh.gov/organization/divisions/water/dwgb/index.htm>. All of the bureau's fact sheets are on-line at <http://des.nh.gov/organization/commissioner/pip/factsheets/dwgb/index.htm>.

Note: This fact sheet is accurate as of October 2008. Statutory or regulatory changes, or the availability of additional information after this date may render this information inaccurate or incomplete.