

# DAAccent.....on State and Local Government

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## WARN:

# Water & Wastewater Agency Review Network

### It Could Happen To You

Virginia emergency response organizations are collaborating on a preparedness promotion as the 2006 hurricane season approaches. "It Could Happen To You" is a public information campaign designed to emphasize the steps citizens should take to get ready for disasters. The Virginia Department of Emergency Management, the Virginia Department of Transportation, The National Weather Service offices in the Commonwealth and the American Red Cross are partnering to help prepare the populace of Virginia.

According to a Virginia Department of Emergency Management (VDEM) news release, these organizations have always worked side by side during emergencies but have partnered this year for a more direct approach in order to reach more people effectively. After the devastating effects of the most recent natural disasters, lessons learned are being put to use.

### Response Organizations Collaborate, So Should Utilities

All utilities have some type of emergency management plan for a time of crisis; but those are usually centered on each facility's reaction as an individual entity. Water and Wastewater Agency Review Network (WARN) is a system for emergency planning response

and recovery on a regional or state wide basis, i.e. utilities

helping utilities.

A large event, such as an earthquake or hurricane, affects the immediate utilities. And while they may have one of the best disaster plans in existence, it may be impossible to implement it, depending on how badly they were affected by the disaster itself.

A huge lesson brought home by Katrina and basically any natural disaster of large proportions is the fact that help from organizations takes time to get to

**The agreement does not obligate a utility to provide or receive aid, but sets up the procedure should the need arise.**



Photos appear courtesy of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration/Department of Commerce.

the affected areas. Local utilities can be isolated until outside help arrives. It may take weeks, days or only hours for outside help to get there but until then these utilities have to support themselves. Neighboring utilities, that were impacted less or maybe not at all, can offer knowledgeable, timely assistance which could be key in mitigating the severity of impact.

Mutual assistance is the basis behind the establishment of an emergency network. California, Florida, Washington, Texas and most recently Louisiana are states that have established water/wastewater agency response networks. All organizations have been spurred by natural disasters so enormous they overwhelmed the available resources' ability to coordinate response with existing plans.

According to an AWWA white paper "*Utilities Helping Utilities: An Action Plan for Mutual Aid and Assistance Networks for Water and Wastewater Utilities*" WARN is based on "a pre-established agreement among a network of utilities that can complement and enhance local capabilities to prepare for and respond to a broad range of threats, both natural and man-made." The agreement does not obligate a utility to provide or receive aid but sets up the procedure should the need arise. Key benefits from participation, as outlined in the paper, include: increased planning and coordina-

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tion; enhanced access to specialized resources; expedited arrival of aid; reduced administrative conflict; and increased hope.

Another important aspect of implementing a WARN program is it will help facilitate meeting new federal disaster grant requirements. By the end of Fiscal Year 2006, all entities: private, non-private and local government associations must adopt the National Incident Management System (NIMS), and accompanying requirements in order to be eligible for federal grants and reimbursements due to a disaster.

### Action Plan

A sample action plan for establishing a mutual assistance or WARN is available from AWWA. This plan presents a guide on how to begin. The following checklist of actions is a starting point:

1. Identify interest in starting a program
2. Form an initial leadership team
3. Prepare a kickoff session
4. Establish a steering committee
5. Identify steering committee goals
6. Review use of state regions
7. Identify mutual aid/assistance activation criteria
8. Draft an agreement
9. Create tools for facilitation
10. Maintain the program

Each action is explained in detail with suggestions and resources. The guide also covers, in depth, the mutual aid and assistance agreement needed in order to facilitate a network. Go to [www.awwa.org/advocacy/govtaff](http://www.awwa.org/advocacy/govtaff) for the guide.

### Resources

The following websites are good sources of information concerning disaster planning and mitigation.

- California Water/Wastewater Agency Response Network [www.calwarn.org](http://www.calwarn.org);
- Florida Water/Wastewater Agency Response Network [www.flawarn.org](http://www.flawarn.org);
- Texas Water/Wastewater Agency Response Network [www.txwarn.org](http://www.txwarn.org);
- Louisiana Water/Wastewater Agency Response Network [www.lawarn.org](http://www.lawarn.org);
- Washington Association of Sewer & Water Districts Mutual Aid Program [www.waswd.org](http://www.waswd.org);
- The Virginia Department of Emergency Management [www.vaemergency.com](http://www.vaemergency.com)
- Federal Emergency Management Agency [www.fema.gov](http://www.fema.gov)

*Draper Aden Associates provides this list of websites for your convenience. We do not claim responsibility for the accuracy of the content or subject matter of these sites.*

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