

By Robert Gray

Law Mandates Vulnerability Assessments

Community water systems serving populations of more than 3,300 will be required to assess their vulnerability to terrorist attack under provisions of legislation Congress has enacted to fight bioterrorism. The assessments also will cover system vulnerability to "other intentional acts intended to substantially disrupt the ability of the system to provide a safe and reliable supply of drinking water," the law states.

Vulnerability analyses will cover such specifics as pipes; physical barriers; water collection; pretreatment; treatment; storage and distribution facilities; electronic, computer or other automated systems; the use, storage and handling of chemicals; and the operation and maintenance of the system.

The deadline for the assessments is March 31, 2003, for systems serving populations of 100,000 or more; Dec. 31, 2003 for systems serving populations more than 50,000 but fewer than 100,000 and June 30, 2004, for systems that serve more than 3,300 but fewer than 50,000. Those serving populations of fewer than 3,300 will receive guidance from the Environmental Protection Agency on their responsibilities under the law.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is required by August 1 to provide information advising systems on what types of terrorist or other acts are probable threats to substantially disrupt a system's ability to provide a safe and reliable supply of drinking water.

The measure authorizes \$160 million for this fiscal year and such amounts as may be needed through fiscal years 2003-2005 to help systems comply with the new requirements.

New Plan Centers On Pollution-Reduction 'Credits'

A Water Quality Trading Policy EPA is proposing would "increase the pace and success of cleaning up impaired rivers, streams and lakes throughout the country," EPA said.

The new policy would keep existing controls and safeguards in place, agency Administrator Christie Whitman said in announcing it, while offering "greater flexibility and incentives to states, tribes and companies to comply with the Clean Water Act."

The plan would involve creation of pollution-reduction "credits." Pollution sources such as industrial and municipal facilities, landowners or farms could gain credits by cutting pollution loads beyond the level required by the most stringent technology requirements. For example, a farmer could create credits by changing crop practices, and a municipal wastewater treatment plant could then use the credits to meet water-quality limits in its permit.

After a public comment period, EPA expects to issue a final policy later this summer. Additional information is available at www.epa.gov/owow/watershed/trading.htm.

Infrastructure Proposal Advances

Legislation to provide additional federal funds to states to meet water infrastructure needs has been approved by the Senate Committee on the Environment and Public Works.

It contains five-year authorizations of \$20 billion for clean water projects such as wastewater treatment plants, \$15 billion for safe drinking water projects, \$5 billion to help smaller communities meet EPA's new arsenic requirements and \$1.25 billion to renew a wet-weather grant program.

The action reflects increased interest in Congress this year on dealing with infrastructure needs. The House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure earlier approved a water-infrastructure measure that differs in important aspects from the bill approved by the Senate committee but heads in the same direction of substantially increased federal assistance.

Antipollution Options Considered on Construction Sites

EPA is considering three alternative approaches on ways to reduce water pollution associated with construction.


One, the agency said, would build on existing federal storm-water regulations by establishing a national effluent guideline specifying the types of runoff controls needed and criteria for how best to design them. A second would rely on site inspections and certifications relating to the proper installation of controls to improve implementation of existing regulations. The third approach would rely on effective implementation of existing regulations.

"These options provide flexibility to builders and government agencies to ensure that unique site-specific concerns such as soil type, local environmental needs and rainfall, are taken into consideration when determining how best to control construction site runoff," EPA said.

After a four-month public-comment period, the agency will issue a final rule. Additional information is available at www.epa.gov/waterscience/guide/construction.

Latest TRI For Water Announced

Approximately 284 million pounds of toxic chemicals were released into the nation's waters in the year 2000, according to the latest Toxic Release Inventory of the EPA. This amount was four percent of the total amount of 7.1 billion pounds of toxics released to water, land and air.

EPA noted that the total had dropped nearly 48 percent since the first TRI in 1988. It also said that the annual report reflects release and other waste-management activities and is not an indicator of potential adverse effects on human health and the environment. 



Robert Gray works out of Locust Grove, Virginia; (540) 972-8326