

## Emergency Preparedness

### A Guide for Public Water Systems

*Ohio Administrative Code rule 3745-85-01 requires public water systems to prepare and update annually a contingency plan.*

#### Why prepare?

Ohio Administrative Code rule 3745-85-01 requires public water systems to prepare and update annually a contingency plan. Plans must include items such as a map of the distribution system, procedures for emergencies and 24-hour telephone numbers.

The rule requirements help prepare systems for emergencies in order to respond to negative impacts that may affect operations, and to:

- fulfill their responsibility to protect employees, the community and the environment;
- improve their capability to recover from interruption of operations and distribution, damages to equipment, and financial losses; and
- enhance their image and credibility in the communities they serve.

#### Where do you begin?

There are several references available to help public water systems plan or improve their ability to respond to emergencies. Three key words to remember during this process are anticipate, prepare, and practice.

#### How do you prepare?

Planning to respond to an emergency can be overwhelming. However, the process can be made easier by focusing on identifying and understanding the features of your system that are critical to produce and distribute safe drinking water to the public.

Simple checklists can serve as mental reminders to operators and help focus their responses during emergencies.

When planning, keep in mind the common and essential tools necessary for maintaining operations during an emergency, such as equipment and supplies, essential personnel, a mutual aid plan, a strategy for communicating with first responders, and a policy for practicing and updating the plan. Each of these tools covers a range of important details that can vary depending on the type of emergency.

Consider how different types of emergencies may affect your system and begin creating your checklists for managing operations during events.

For example, what portions of your system may be affected during a flooding event? What portions of the system would you want to check first? What would you do if the system became contaminated? How would you isolate the contamination? Who should you contact? Examples of questions related to each of these critical tools are listed in the following sections.



When updating your emergency preparedness plan, remember these three key words: anticipate, prepare, and practice!

**ANTICIPATE** the different forms of aid your system may require in the event of an emergency.

**PREPARE** and agree to a written mutual aid strategy with other systems in surrounding communities.

**PRACTICE** the aid strategy by conducting drills with the systems that have volunteered their assistance.

# Emergency Preparedness

## Equipment and Supplies

- What equipment must operate continuously and/or at key periods to sustain essential functions and processes? Is replacement equipment available?
- What are the system's primary and supporting components? What would be the consequences if one fails? How will you repair them if they fail?
- How much of each material (for example, chlorine) does your system need to sustain its operations? Which are necessary to support the most critical operations?
- What materials might you be able to substitute if you are not able to obtain the preferred critical ones?
- Do you have a backup plan for obtaining an alternate water supply?

## Essential Personnel

- Based on operational demands, how many workers are needed to maintain the system during an emergency?
- What are the essential operations that you might support temporarily through external contracts?

## Communicating with First Responders, the Public, and Government

- Have you met first responders in your system's region? Have you established methods for communicating with them in event of an emergency?
- Have first responders visited your system? Do they know the layout and how your system functions? Have you shown them your emergency response plan?
- Has your system developed a plan for communicating with the public? Do you have sufficient resources for providing information to the public quickly?
- Have you shared your communication strategy with government agencies? Do you know if the government agencies that regulate your system have methods available for you to communicate with them during an emergency?

## Mutual Aid

- What businesses, communities and other utilities can help your system sustain its operations during an emergency?
- Are there other systems in your region that have adequate stockpiles of material and/or cross-trained personnel that can be of aid to your system?
- Are you part of your community's emergency preparedness process?

## Practicing and Updating Your Plan

- Has your system established a schedule for practicing and updating the response plan?
- Have you conducted various exercises, including one that would incorporate first responders? Were responders and/or people from your mutual aid network invited to participate?
- Have you updated your plan following these exercises?

## More Information

For more information, please contact Ohio EPA's Division of Drinking and Ground Waters at 614-644-2752 or visit our [Emergency Preparedness and Security website](#).