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Straight Talk On Water Security

In this new era of heightened domestic security concerns, drinking water professionals are working vigilantly to safeguard our most valuable natural resource: water. Following is an update on the steps taken by water systems around the nation in coordination with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and other Federal, state, and local agencies.

- The 2002 Public Health and Bioterrorism Preparedness and Response Act required water utilities to evaluate systemwide vulnerabilities and develop emergency response protocols.
- Large and medium systems completed “vulnerability assessments” (VAs) by the end of 2003 and small systems will complete their VAs by June 2004.
- The American Water Works Association estimates \$2 billion nationwide is being spent among water suppliers to address basic security needs, including improved fencing, lights, alarms and locks.
- Scientists and manufacturers are working to bring improved water quality monitoring devices to the marketplace to bolster security throughout distribution systems.
- Through the creation of the “Water Information Sharing and Analysis Center,” which provides a secure portal for the communication of sensitive security information, utilities are cooperating closely with one another and appropriate authorities.
- Drinking water professionals are undergoing intense training on such issues as vulnerability assessments, security hardware education, and emergency response planning.
- Security protocols have been put in place to ensure that sensitive information shared between water utilities and Federal agencies does not fall into the wrong hands.
- Water professionals have inventoried past security threats to community water systems, and analyzed the lessons learned from them.

While much has already been done to safeguard America’s water supply, the nation’s water utilities will continue to evaluate and reevaluate potential threats as well as the needs for greater physical protection and new technology to aid in this effort.