

# Connecting Water Utilities and Emergency Management Agencies



## 1. Build Relationships

Water utilities and Emergency Management Agencies (EMAs) can work together to better respond to emergencies. Learn how below.

**Share day-to-day and emergency contact information.** You can also figure out other ways to communicate. Hand-held radios work well when phone services are lost.

*Benefits: Better communication*

**Attend each other's events.** State and local EMAs may give training useful to water utilities. Water utilities and EMAs can include roles for each other in their exercises. EPA's [Training & Exercise Plan](#) and [Tabletop Exercise](#) tools can help.

*Benefits: Information exchange and joint problem solving*

### **WATER UTILITIES:**

Water utilities can give EMA staff tours of their facilities.

*Benefits: EMAs better understand water utilities' emergency needs*

### **EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCIES:**

EMAs can give water utilities access to the Emergency Operations Center (EOC). Water utilities could staff a "water desk" in the EOC during emergencies. Or, EMAs could provide access to a tool like WebEOC to water utilities.

*Benefits: Better coordination*



## Relationship Building

The Portland Bureau of Emergency Management (PBEM) and the Portland Water Bureau (Portland Water) have a strong partnership. They plan and participate in joint training exercises, including earthquake exercises and dam safety drills. Portland Water partners with PBEM to manage "PublicAlerts". PBEM's Emergency Coordination Center and Portland Water's Emergency Operations Center are co-located in adjacent offices. They work together daily and during emergencies such as major snow storms.

## 2. Coordinate Planning

Both sectors can share their [emergency response plans](#) (ERPs) and [emergency operations plans](#) (EOPs). Important items to talk about are [emergency water](#) and sanitation services. EMAs could include water utilities in their city or county's [Hazard Mitigation Plan](#). EPA's [Hazard Mitigation Guide](#) can help. Water utilities can join their [Local Emergency Planning Committee](#) (LEPC).

*Benefits: Save money, identify gaps, receive funding and meet response partners*



### Resource Sharing

At an exercise, a Pennsylvania county EMA learned that a local water utility bottled water. Later, a private water system at a nursing home failed. The nursing home called the EMA for alternate drinking water, and the EMA contacted the local utility to provide the bottled water.



### Funding Through Planning

The Phoenix Wastewater Treatment Plant was at risk of flooding. The utility and the city worked with the Maricopa County Department of Emergency Management and received funds from FEMA's Hazard Mitigation Grant Program to reduce the threat.

## 3. Share Emergency Capabilities

The EMA can share information about how to ask for resources during emergencies. Water utilities can share information on their back-up generators, fuel supply, and Water and Wastewater Agency Response Network (WARN) membership. Both sectors will find EPA's [Response-On-The-Go](#) mobile website and App helpful.

*Benefits: Access to resources and improved response*



## Emergency Communication

Rains caused floods that damaged the Upper Thompson Sanitation District (UTSD) in Colorado. Public information and emergency communications were difficult. Larimer County EMA sent two public information staff to develop incident Web and Facebook pages. They also wrote press releases. After, UTSD got a grant for 800MHz hand-held radios to communicate when phone services are out.

## 4. Develop Joint Messages

Water utilities can develop [\*risk communication plans\*](#) with EMAs. You can work together to write water use [\*notices ahead of time\*](#). Drinking water utilities will need to follow the [\*Public Notification Rule\*](#). Also, both utilities and EMAs could identify how to share notices with the public. One way is the [\*Integrated Public Alert & Warning System\*](#).

*Benefits: Better public notification*

## 5. Issue Access Cards

Water utility workers need to get to and repair their facilities quickly after a disaster. State and local EMAs could consider issuing responder ID cards to water utility staff.

*Benefit: Quicker community recovery*



## Utility Access During Emergencies

Water utilities in Utah can issue a common ID card to staff. This alerts law enforcement and National Guard staff to let utility workers pass roadblocks. The Rural Water Association of Utah makes the ID cards.

## 6. Know When to Involve Law Enforcement

Sometimes water utilities may need both law enforcement and EMA help. You should call local law enforcement when you notice:

- Unusual or suspicious behavior
- Unusual questions about water facilities
- Tampering of fences, locks or gates
- Abandoned items
- Unknown vehicles
- Facility surveillance
- Cyber attacks

Water utilities can use the activities in this guide to build their relationship with law enforcement. They can also plan how to share sensitive information during investigations.

If you suspect an act of terrorism, notify the [\*local FBI field office\*](#) for help.



### Resilience Partnerships

Orange Water and Sewer Authority (OWASA) in Chapel Hill, North Carolina experienced a fluoride overfeed at the water treatment plant. The water with elevated fluoride was fully contained at the plant and the plant was taken off line. OWASA opened its interconnect with the city of Durham. The next day, a 12-inch main break led Orange County to activate its EOC. The Orange County Health Department met with all key players and issued a “Do Not Use, Do Not Drink” notice. Customers reduced their water demand by 37 percent. Key lessons learned include:

- Be prepared for the “what ifs”
- Interconnect drinking water systems
- Know the National Incident Management System (NIMS)
- Know your response partners
- Be open, honest and transparent
- Use After Action Reviews to improve future responses