

# WARN, a Catalyst for High Performance Emergency Preparedness

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By the New England Water Environment Association



*The New England Water Environment Association (NEWEA) is a not-for-profit technical and educational organization that promotes the protection and enhancement of our water environment. Comprised of the six New England States, NEWEA serves over 2,000 members and is a member association of the Water Environment Federation (WEF), an internationally renowned organization. NEWEA's mission is to provide education and technical training via an open and interactive forum for the water quality professionals while advancing public understanding and advocating sound water resources policy.*

The wastewater industry was designated a critical infrastructure and key resources (CIKR) sector by Homeland Security Presidential Directive 7 (HSPD-7) in 2003, and this designation clearly confirmed that the wastewater industry is critical to the quality of life in the United States as we know it. It has been estimated that approximately 75% of the U.S. population has its sanitary sewerage treated by centralized wastewater systems. Consider the potential magnitude of service disruption consequences such as:

- public health and sanitation issues,
- economic consequences associated with service interruptions,
- impacts on plants, animals, and aquatic life,
- environmental standards violations, and
- damage to buildings, institutions, and landmarks.

In 2005, Hurricane Katrina compromised more than 200 wastewater treatment facilities. In New England, catastrophic storms in recent years have had significant negative impacts on wastewater operations and the safety of staff, including the loss of two water quality professionals' lives in Vermont during Tropical Storm Irene, August 2011. Further examples include ice storms, the Rhode Island floods in 2010, the Vermont floods in 2011, extended power outages in Connecticut due to Tropical Storm Irene, the October 2011 snow storm, and the devastation of the historic Hurricane Sandy.

Considering events with catastrophic negative consequences, NEWEA believes utilities should review potential risks and pre-plan for potential service interruptions. It is usually the synergy from implementing a number of risk mitigation measures that is truly effective. This paper will briefly summarize potential risk mitigation measures; including the Water and Wastewater Agency Response Network (WARN). While effective, and generally supported in large numbers by New England wastewater utilities, WARN is only one of many options for mutual aid during a response event which may include local mutual aid agreements, response plans, infrastructure improvements, and others.

Risk mitigation measures to be included as part of an overall emergency preparedness program should include:

- identification, assessment, and prioritization of risks,
- mitigation of risks to the greatest extent possible,
- development of a risk-based emergency preparedness plan,
- development of an emergency preparedness management system in accordance with National Fire Protection Association Standard 1600,
- implementation of the National Incident Management System / Incident Command System,
- emergency preparedness training,

- conduct tabletop exercises and other simulations,
- participation in Local Emergency Planning Committees,
- development of mutual aid agreements with contiguous communities, and
- participation in your state's WARN.

It is highly advisable to develop and implement an emergency preparedness plan with the elements presented above. Any plan should be regularly reviewed and practiced through table-top exercises, internal drills, and large-scale multi-agency simulations. In addition, NEWEA strongly believes in joining and supporting WARN in your particular state.

WARN is a network of utilities helping other utilities to respond to and recover from emergencies. The purpose of WARN is to provide a method whereby water and wastewater utilities that have sustained or anticipate damages from natural or human-caused incidents can provide and receive emergency aid and assistance in the form of personnel, equipment, materials, and other associated services as necessary from other water and wastewater utilities.

The business case for participating in WARN is presented in the report, entitled, "Economic Benefits of Forming and Participating in a Water/Wastewater Agency Response Network," published in September 2008 by the American Water Works Association (AWWA). Tangible benefits cited include reduced cost to purchase and maintain back-up portable generator capability, reduced loss of water/wastewater revenue, reduced cost of carrying contingency inventory for other supplies and equipment, and reduced cost to respond to adverse incidents. Intangible benefits cited include an improved ability to respond to emergencies due to training, lessons learned and experiences shared by other WARN participants, reduced insurance costs, improved bond rating, and improved customer satisfaction. This all translates into an improved ability to respond as well as a reduced cost to respond. One of the primary benefits of joining WARN is that member utilities can request emergency assistance in the absence of a federal disaster declaration. All response figures are based strictly on FEMA's Schedule of Equipment Rates in accordance with the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act.



Information on WARN can be found at [www.nationalwarn.org](http://www.nationalwarn.org). The website provides WARN resources, including background information, sample agreements, outreach materials, exercise guidance documents, etc.

NEWEA calls upon its member utilities to invest in emergency preparedness, including WARN membership. It will be a catalyst for life safety, property protection, environmental protection, operational continuity, and reputation management.



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