

Clear as Mud

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As most of you are aware, providing the public with water goes far beyond the effort it requires to just turn on the tap. The general misconception that water is basically free because it falls from the sky and runs by in a neighboring river is commonplace among the public. However, a great deal of responsibility and liability accompanies the duties of being a water utility.

There are several components and tasks associated with a water system, including analysis, distribution, storage, and treatment. Each piece of the puzzle is separate and requires the others to be whole. The daily tasks associated with each part are fairly elementary for veteran operators, but looking at each of them individually from a security perspective can be a daunting task.

The idea of security and emergency management in relation to water systems has been gaining momentum for several years. This year, the state of Oregon required all public water systems to perform Vulnerability Assessments (VA) and Emergency Response Plans (ERP). Following suit set into motion previously by the EPA with a more stringent state mandate. Meeting the minimum requirements for compliance was not an easy task, and some are still in the process. Many people might be thinking since they met the minimum requirements they are finished. Is your job ever really done in any other way? If the answer is no, then the same goes for emergency response and the procedures involved.

OAWU has been offering free training in regards to this topic providing systems with some guidance and a general overview of resources to draw from. Embedded within the practice of emergency management is the ever present need for true evaluation of your system and its capabilities. Some of these capabilities are beyond your control as an operator and are inherit traits of the system. But with some persuasion many things are subject to change.

The nature of the ERP requires you to seek outside guidance through the vast array of emergency management agencies and contacts. As operators many of you wear several hats and your required

duties spread you pretty thin, is a well known fact. To combat this we offer training and assistance whenever possible.

In review, one of the primary messages of the SEMS class was that an ERP will only be as good as what you put into to it. Depending on the size of your system if only the minimum requirements were met, the end result will probably be severely deficient plan in a time of crisis. With this in mind, the evaluation of the system goes beyond a realistic assessment of just the structures and security items. It requires the need to look at operations of staff and the communication and coordination of outside organizations. Sounds good on paper, but just how does this occur in with only an achievable amount of effort? Well to put it plainly, initially on paper! A true test will require mock exercises and training, where staff and local government can participate. Tabletop exercises are the first step in the training process.

A thorough assessment of your ERP will consist of getting the key players to the table to discuss the plan and run an exercise. Who are these key players? A good start would be the First Responders.

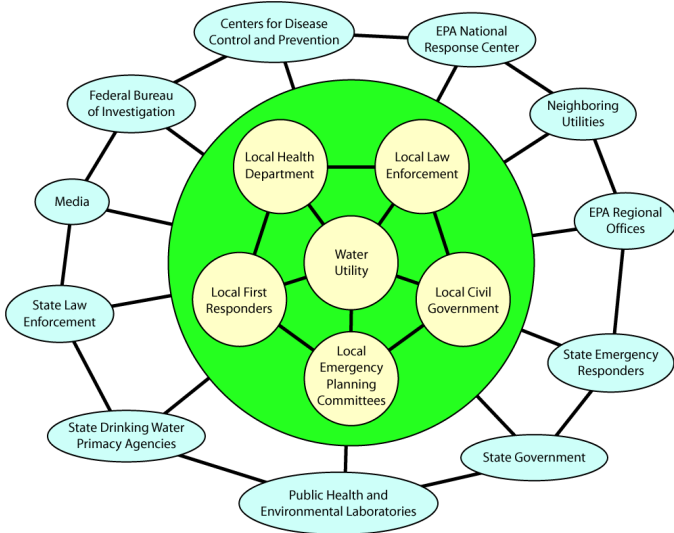
- System Staff and Local Government
- Police
- Fire
- ERP County Contact
- Health Department

A preliminary step to the exercise will be sharing non-sensitive portions of your ERP with the aforementioned agencies to establish lines of communication and get in the loop. Communication is the first step, and once the initial contact is made consider offering a water system tour to the Police Department and the Local Fire Department. A few minutes at the system will be worth mounds of paper in explanation. When the first responders understand your needs, and the water system understands how these agencies will respond, the applicability of your plan will increase dramatically.

Depending on the scope of the exercise/incident several of the agencies contained in the enclosed diagram will need to be notified. The FBI is among these and will have jurisdiction in any incident that is deemed a terrorist act.

what the shortcomings are in the exercise than in a real-world situation when lives may be at stake.

OAWU staff can help you run an exercise and take an honest look at your ERP. At the end of the exercise you will have a better view of what it takes to respond to a situation and the muddy waters will run clear. These proposed exercises should only take a few hours of your time and the cooperation of some outside agencies. You will gain insight into your operations and of those involved. These exercises will help make a stressful transition period run smoother, making everyone's job easier. As the saying goes, practice makes perfect.



Many of the ideas of the VA and ERP are theoretical until put into practice, they may be hard to grasp and are *clear as mud*. But the following items will help solidify some of these tasks and practices. With a small amount of effort you'll find that the proposed exercises are a good use of your time. You will also find that after the exercise your grasp on these concepts will become solid like the grip of a Greco-roman wrestler.

The exercises can be made as complex or straight forward as the system deems necessary. The EPA Response Protocol Toolbox offers a wide range of guidance accessories for exercise purposes and plan enhancement. The toolbox has a great deal of information in regards to management decisions in accordance with timelines. Time is a factor that plagues every emergency situation. In a sense, your initial ERP is just the beginning of emergency management; the practices associated within can and should be expanded upon. Even the simplest exercises will be a true test of your individual ERP.

The main goals of running an exercise are determining how each agency will fulfill their role and to familiarize each responder with individual system procedures. Through this process the need for change in an ERP will possibly become evident. Solutions to any deficiencies can be determined at the end of the exercise in a debriefing session with the organizations involved. It is better to know