



**WATER /WASTEWATER AGENCY RESPONSE NETWORK**

## **WARN FAQ**

*Updated May 5, 2010*

### **1. What is a Water/Wastewater Agency Response Network (WARN)?**

- A WARN is a network of utilities helping utilities.
- A WARN program uses a mutual aid and assistance agreement that allows utilities to cross jurisdictional boundaries to provide aid and assistance (personnel, equipment, and other resources) in preparing for, responding to, or recovering from an emergency.
- Participation is voluntary; there is no obligation to respond.

### **2. Why is a WARN important? What is the purpose of a WARN?**

- A WARN establishes an agreement and protocols to access specialized resources such as knowledgeable water and wastewater utility personnel or utility specific heavy equipment, tools and supplies.
- A WARN provides a forum for establishing and maintaining emergency contacts.
- A WARN can facilitate training.
- A WARN helps fill the need for personnel and resources before the arrival of government aid.

### **3. What are the benefits of a WARN?**

- There is no cost to participate.
- WARN is like investing in a no cost insurance policy to enhance access to specialized water and wastewater resources.
- WARN increases emergency preparedness and coordination.
- WARN provides a single agreement to access resources statewide.
- WARN expedites arrival of aid (don't have to work out the administrative items; the agreements and WARN protocols work them out in advance for you).
- WARN agreement contains indemnification and worker's compensation provisions to protect participating utilities and provide reimbursement protocols.
- WARN collaborates and responds to the needs of the public and private utility members.

### **4. How does a utility get assistance during an emergency?**

- The WARN member who needs help identifies the resources needed to respond.
- The WARN member in need can either directly contact a fellow WARN member who has the necessary resources or use a state specific process of requesting aid.

### **5. Are member utilities required to respond and send resources?**

- There is no obligation to respond.
- It is up to the lending utility to determine if resources are available and if it can send the requested resource.

**6. What happens if a utility sends resources and needs them back?**

- Under no circumstances is a utility to send resources if it impacts their ability to manage daily operations or manage response to its own emergency.
- Resources remain under the authority of the sending utility, and as such can be recalled any time.

**7. What happens if equipment on loan is damaged or stolen?**

- Articles VII, VIII, and IX of the sample agreement offer a framework for how to manage the issue of loss or damage with clear identification of cost reimbursement, dispute resolution, and indemnification.

**8. Are WARN mutual aid and assistance activities eligible for FEMA reimbursement?**

- FEMA reimbursement may apply only after a Presidential declaration of emergency.
- FEMA-specific requirements related to WARN include:
  - The agreement was in effect **prior** to the response/deployment to the incident.
  - The assistance must be requested by the utility in need;
  - The work performed, supplies used and materials consumed are directly related to the disaster and is otherwise eligible for FEMA assistance;
  - The entity can provide documentation of rates and payment for services, if requested; and

**9. Will a utility be reimbursed for the use of their resources?**

- While a utility may offer assistance free from reimbursement, Article VII of the sample agreement details how a utility that sends assistance is reimbursed by the utility in need.

**10. How is WARN different from an existing statewide mutual aid program managed by emergency management?**

- Statewide mutual aid/assistance agreements typically require a declaration of "emergency" by a local and/or state official to activate the agreement; WARN agreements do not require the declaration of an emergency, saving critical time in response to needs identified by the utility.
- Statewide programs typically do not include private utilities; WARN agreements do.
- Statewide agreements are managed by the state emergency management agency; WARN is managed by utilities.

**11. Is WARN help available for disasters other than hurricanes or earthquakes?**

- WARN is available in all types of emergencies, whether they are small, medium, or large. WARNs have been activated to respond to a wide variety of emergencies such as fires, floods, and water supply contamination as demonstrated in the report *Economic Benefits of Forming & Participating in WARN*.
- Signatories to a WARN agreement can provide and/or request assistance any time their system needs emergency assistance.

**12. Who should be involved in helping develop and sustain a WARN?**

- Utility owner/operators with varied professional association representation
- State water and wastewater primacy agency (State health, environmental protection, etc.)
- State emergency management and/or homeland security agency
- US EPA region representation

**13. What help is available to form a WARN?**

- AWWA report – *Utilities Helping Utilities: An Action Plan For Mutual Aid and Assistance Networks for Water and Wastewater Utilities* provide the foundation for the formation of a WARN program.
- EPA can often help with post workshop support on a case-by-case basis, depending on available funding and the specific needs of the program. Support could include facilitation of meetings and workshops, administrative support, and answer technical questions.

**14. How do WARNs work across state lines?**

- The key issues of interstate response are differences in tort liability, immunity and licensing requirements.
- Currently, the Emergency Management Assistance Compact (EMAC) is being used by all fifty states and the District of Columbia to share resources across state lines, because it already addresses the key issues.
- AWWA is a member of the EMAC Advisory Council with intent to facilitate greater cooperation and coordination between WARN and EMAC.
- The water sector is evaluating issues related to improving interstate aid while working with the administrators of EMAC to ensure that it can be used effectively for the water sector.

**15. Existing WARNs do not appear to be legal entities. Should they acquire non-profit organization status?**

- At this point none of the WARNs have established themselves as a separate entity requiring any special status, as there are no funds transferred between the members and the WARN.
- In several instances utilities or associations have acted as a grant recipient on behalf of the WARN, thus acting as the fiduciary agent, to support training, website, and related activities
- Existing WARN programs are free for utilities to participate.

**16. Are funds available to support the WARN effort?**

- Each existing WARN program has handled things differently, with many using voluntary time/services that may be supplemented with funding from various sources, such as supporting associations or state primacy agency grants.
- The collaboration with primacy and emergency management agencies on the WARN program may lead to opportunities to fund specific WARN activities.
- Some existing WARNs have used Homeland Security and US EPA grants. Others have obtained local grants.

**17. What does managing a WARN entail?**

- Establishing regular meetings of the leadership team and/or steering committee which can be done via phone conferences, web conferences or face to face.
- Coordination with professional association meetings.
- Facilitate annual meetings or quarterly/monthly conference calls of the steering committee to address develop issues, plan WARN activities.
- Manage outreach and marketing of the WARN program for new membership, including "holding" the agreements.
- Services can be managed with in kind contributions from the members or by using grant funds.

**18. How do we get a website going?**

- AWWA has reserved the domain name for every state, Canadian Province, and Mexico.
- AWWA will release the domain name when a steering committee has been established and is prepared to initiate development of a website at no charge.
- Other existing WARNs have offered their source code free of charge to emerging WARNs.

**19. If a resource database is established, how is it updated and who updates it?**

- Many WARN websites include resource databases that are maintained by the member utilities.
- Reminder e-mails are sent to the member utilities to remind them to update the information.
- AWWA's Water and Wastewater Mutual Aid and Assistance Resource Typing Manual provides consistent terms and definitions for specific resources to expedite both requests and responses and has been recognized as a resource by EMAC.

**20. How do WARNs support training and exercises?**

- WARNs historically have held annual meetings which include training components.
- A small fee for the training has been charged to pay for material duplication and food.
- Each WARN has created a set of its own best practices, including FlaWARN's review of lessons learned from the 2005 hurricane season.
- Nationally, a variety of supporting training has been or is being developed including NIMS and can be conducted at WARN programs.
- Many WARN programs have conducted tabletop exercises based on EPA's WARN Tabletop Exercise Facilitator Guide.

**21. How do you get members to buy-in to the WARN concept?**

- While the benefits of participating in a WARN is obvious to many, others require more explicit evidence.
- A sample flyer is included in the Action Plan, and the report Economic Benefits of Forming & Participating in WARN was prepared to help a utility make the "business case" for leadership.
- WARNs are encouraged to participate in professional association programs to announce WARN activities.
- Presentations may be required to elected boards.
- Copies of presentations used by existing WARN may be available.
- AWWA has published a Webcast and articles on the subject.

**22. How does a WARN operate before, during, and after an emergency?**

- Some existing WARNs created by-laws along with the agreement that help outline the pre-emergency governance and activities.
- Each WARN is encouraged to develop an Operational Plan that outlines how it functions during and after an emergency. If the WARN does not have by-laws, the Operational Plan would include pre-emergency information as well.
- A Sample Operational Plan is located on www.NationalWARN.org and is consistent with the National Incident Management System IC 510 training module on mutual aid.

**22. How does the WARN integrate with local Emergency Management Agencies?**

- The relationship between WARN and local emergency management agencies is addressed in the WARN Operational Plan. WARNs are encouraged to meet with local and state emergency management agencies to discuss how to provide representation at the local and state emergency operation centers.
- While WARN members can request aid directly from each other, WARNs should communicate mutual aid and assistance activities with the local and state emergency management agencies to minimize potential duplication of effort and coordinate security and access needs.