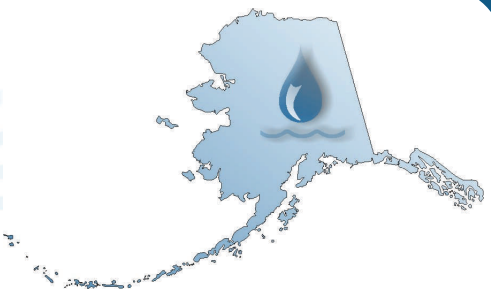
Northern Flows



Alaska's Drinking Water Program Newsletter

Issue 31 ● Fall 2007

Message from the Manager

It is fall in Alaska, and as usual, wet. Recently, our precipitation patterns, at least for south-central and southeast Alaska, seem to be heaviest in the fall, making up for our very dry spring and early summer. Even our temperatures around the state have been more moderate than usual. Perhaps the dryer than usual spring and early summer weather, the wetter than usual fall weather, and more moderate temperatures are a sign of bigger changes to come. We know that many glaciers in Alaska are actively receding; a good example of this is Portage Glacier.

Are we really in a global warming trend? Are the Polar Bears doomed for extinction? Will the State of Washington run out of water and Alaska and Canada pipe water to Washington State or other western states? Thought-provoking questions. Now what does this have to do with drinking water and Alaska public water systems? From the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) Drinking Water Program's perspective, it is "planning". Now is the time for communities, utility mangers, and Public Water System (PWS) owners to plan for their future drinking water needs and to develop and implement written emergency response preparedness plans that clearly designate a readily available alternate source of drinking water. Now is also the time, if not already done, for communities and PWS owners to protect the source of their drinking water with drinking water protection plans. It is never too late to be proactive, and now is a good time to start.

The Drinking Water Program continues to add new staff as a follow-up to our approved budget request from fiscal year 2008. Please welcome James Latimer, Environmental Program Specialist in the Anchorage office; Dawhn Bodyfelt, Environmental Program Specialist in the Fairbanks office; and LeAnn Smith, Environmental Program Specialist in the Wasilla office. Dawhn was previously working in the Drinking Water Program as an Environmental Program Technician and LeAnn was working in the Food Safety and Sanitation Program as an Environmental Health Officer. Additionally, William "Bill" Tyrell, PE, joined the Drinking Water Program as an Environmental Engineer in the Anchorage office. We are currently recruiting for engineering staff in our Anchorage or Wasilla office and also for an Analyst Programmer in our Anchorage office. If you are interested in working in a friendly and "family style" work environment, as well as a dynamic and challenging regulatory public health program, check out Workplace Alaska recruitment as we post these DEC Drinking Water Program positions. All of these positions provide support and promote the program's focused goal of "drinking water, good to the last drop." Check for Workplace Alaska recruitment notices at: http://www.jobs.state.ak.us/ and click on "Workplace Alaska".

This is our first issue of our electronic Drinking Water Program – *Northern Flows* newsletter, and use of E-News to provide this information to our readers. I hope it meets everyone's expectations and needs. If not, please let us know what we can do to make it better for everyone.

Have a great fall "harvest" season!

James R. Weise

James Weise
Manager
Alaska Drinking Water Program

This Issue

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WARN

By Shannon DeWandel

The acronym most commonly used to refer to mutual aid and assistance networks is WARN, which stands for Water/ Wastewater Agency Response Networks. A WARN may consist of public and private water systems, state agencies (Drinking Water Program, Emergency Management, etc.), as well as technical assistance providers such as Alaska Rural Water Association, Alaska Water Wastewater Management Association, and tribal health consortiums.

A key element of proactive preparedness would be to initiate a WARN, or a mutual aid agreement with a neighboring water system. Developing a statewide mutual aid and assistance network, or a WARN, is a low-cost, highly effective, all-hazards approach to preparing your utility for a local, regional, statewide, or national disaster. Water systems are critical to every community. Protection of public drinking water systems should be a high priority for local officials as well as water system owners and operators to ensure an uninterrupted water supply, which is essential for the protection of public health (safe drinking water and sanitation) and safety (fire fighting).

A signed mutual aid and assistance agreement does not obligate a utility to provide or receive aid but does provide a tool for use should a water system need it. It's a "neighbors helping neighbors" plan, so helping them when they have an emergency could get you the benefits of assistance when you experience an event. Having an agreement in place prior to an emergency can also help the agencies responding to requests for help by providing personnel, assets, or equipment from another water system in the WARN. Listed below are some of the basic benefits of having or participating in a mutual aid and assistance network:

- Agreements complement local and regional joint planning for incident response, and such agreements meet federal grant requirements. The networking prior to an emergency helps utilities identify the people to call on for help in the event an incident occurs.
- The basic function of the agreement is to quickly make available specialized utility resources when and where they are needed. Agreements ensure the timely arrival of vital water and wastewater equipment, personnel, and other resources.
- The federal and state government resources can't provide all utility needs immediately. Mutual aid agreements streamline the steps in the process so that resources can be more easily requested and potentially arrive in a timely manner.
- Restoring water and wastewater service provides a sense of comfort and hope to the public that a "return to normal" is not far away.
- Agreements clarify who is liable and responsible (workman's compensation, insurance), when and how much reimbursement (wages, lease or rental costs of equipment, etc.) the system that is helping will receive for their assistance, and other administrative issues that could slow response in the absence of an agreement.

The purpose behind introducing this subject is to determine the amount of interest within the state to establish a WARN in Alaska. The end result for a WARN in Alaska could very well be more water systems that are better prepared and more self-reliant when it comes to dealing with emergencies or incidents through the use of mutual aid agreements with nearby or regional water systems for either equipment, parts, or personnel.

The Alaska Rural Water Association, Alaska Water Wastewater Management Association, and Department of Environmental Conservation's Drinking Water Program are asking for input to determine the level of interest within the state for the establishment of this network.

For more information or to relay comments, please contact Shannon DeWandel, Drinking Water Program's Public Water System Security Specialist, at (907) 269-8924. Shannon's email is Shannon.Dewandel@alaska.gov. To find an example of a Mutual Aid Agreement Form, please visit the Security webpage at: → http://www.dec.state.ak.us/eh/dw/security/security.html

Managerial Capacity

By Kathy Kastens

Managerial Capacity … What is it? Do we want it and how do we get it?

Has your Public Water System (PWS) management team created an organization that supports proper financial management and technical operations (or system management)? **Management capacity** means that the water system has the institutional and administrative resources needed to comply with drinking water regulations. One thing you may want to remember is when service is poor or your system can't keep up with state and federal requirements, customers and regulators alike will assume that this equates to poor management.

No matter if your PWS is part of a city, village corporation, or is privately owned, it needs to think of itself as a business in order to provide the best product to its customers. This is a frequently repeated philosophy; but, what is meant by it? Successfully managing a business requires specific management skills, and you need to have a solid knowledge of business practices. You need to be a leader, have decision-making skills, and know how to manage your resources and to empower employees. Additionally, you'll need to know how to set rates, file applicable taxes, work with legal considerations, forecast for future growth of your system, and be aware of financing options. For instance, do you have a good handle on debt collection, revenues and expenditures; and does your system take in enough revenue to pay for the maintenance and operation of your system along with your overhead? As a manager you need to stay informed on all aspects of your business.

This can be a very difficult thing to do if the management of your system is not set up to look at itself as a business. Owners and managers of a water system must look towards the future. Such things as the need for financing, the impact of new regulation or the loss of key customers will present management demands that can only be met through sound business planning. Any good business endeavor will have a proactive management style. Ask yourself if your system has the indicators below, and be honest. If you can't say, "Yes, we do that", then maybe it's time that you start working towards being able to say "yes" in the future. Some of the signs of running a good business are:

Ownership accountability

- Is the system owner(s) clearly identified?
- Can the owner be held accountable for the system?
- Is it clear who is in charge of what for the system?
- Are your future directions clear?
- Have you developed effective strategies to deal with issues of concern to your system?
- Do you consider the consequences of your decisions?

Staffing and organization

- Are the system operator(s) and manager(s) clearly identified?
- Is the system properly organized and staffed?
- Do personnel understand the management aspects of regulatory requirements and system operations?
- Do the system owners have adequate expertise to manage water system operations?
- Do personnel have the necessary certifications?
- Do you make sure your staff is well trained?

Key areas of workload

- Do you have a deliberately organized and written regulatory compliance program?
- Do you have an organized approach to maintenance?
- Are you prepared to handle emergencies?
- Are your operations conducted safely?

Effective external linkages

- Does the system interact well with customers, regulators, and other entities?
- Is the system aware of available external resources, such as technical and financial assistance?
- If you are planning on improving your management capacity, four questions are common to all planning endeavors:
  1. Where are we now?
  2. Where do we want to be?
  3. How do we get there?
  4. How will we measure our progress?

There are several Technical Assistance Providers that can help you

Continued on page 4

Managerial Capacity (cont.)

By Kathy Kastens

locate training and/or provide training on utilities management and financial management. An excellent resource for training is the Rural Utilities Business Advisory (RUBA) program; many others include the Alaska Training and Technical Assistance Center, Alaska Water and Wastewater Management Association, Alaska Rural Water Association, and the Rural Community Assistance Corporation.

In addition to the resources previously noted, EPA has several tools which may be of assistance to you as you work on improving your managerial capacity:

http://www.epa.gov/safewater/smallsys/ssinfo.htm — Some specific tools include:

- Asset Management STEP Guide
  http://www.epa.gov/safewater/smallsys/pdfs/guide_smallsystems_asset_mgmnt.pdf
- Strategic Planning STEP Guide
  http://www.epa.gov/safewater/smallsys/pdfs/guide_smallsystems_stratplan.pdf
- Water System Operator Roles and Responsibilities
  http://www.epa.gov/safewater/smallsys/pdfs/guide_smallsystems_operator_08-25-06.pdf
- Water System Owner Roles and Responsibilities
  http://www.epa.gov/safewater/smallsys/pdfs/guide_smallsystems_owner_08-25-06.pdf
- Talking to Your Decision Maker
  http://www.epa.gov/safewater/smallsys/pdfs/guide_smallsystems_decision_makers_08-25-06.pdf
- CUPPS, expected release date Dec 2007/Jan 2008
  http://www.epa.gov/safewater/smallsys/pdfs/guide_smallsystems_owner_08-25-06.pdf

What's Wrong With This Picture?

By Scott Forgue

This photograph was taken during an inspection of a public water system. "What's wrong with this picture?"

(Answer on page 6.)

ALASKA
Department of
Environmental
Conservation

Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation
Drinking Water Program
with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
and
The Alaska Training/Technical Assistance Center

Presents

Disinfection Byproducts and Microbial Rules Training

November 13-15, 2007

Wilda Marston Theater
Z.J. Loussac Public Library
3600 Denali Street
Anchorage, AK 99503

(1.6 CEUs are available)

The workshop is free, but **registration is required.**
You can register online at
http://www.dec.state.ak.us/eh/dw/training.html
or
Contact Dan Weber at (907) 269-7514, or email
daniel.weber@alaska.gov
Please register by November 2, 2007

Hotel accommodations within walking distance of the workshop are available at a discounted rate. ***Reservations must be made by October 26, 2007.***
Please contact Dan Weber for more details.

What's Wrong with this Picture?

By Scott Forgue

ANSWER: Notice the electrical supply that is powering the chlorine injection pump. One of the two outlets was wired to provide electrical power to the injection pump only when the water well pump is energized and it is labeled "CHLORINE." This is done to regulate the dose of chlorine and prevent overfeeding.

At the time of the inspection, the chemical feed pump was operating continuously and was injecting chlorine regardless of whether the well pump was energized. This resulted in overfeed of chlorine. Overfeed of chlorine potentially results in a violation of the Drinking Water Regulations, 18 AAC 80.302, Maximum Residual Disinfectant Levels (MRDL), which is established as 4.0 mg/L (as Cl_2) in 40 CFR 141.65.

If you would like to see something interesting with a public water system in a future issue, send your picture showing something wrong with a drinking water system to Scott Forgue at scott.forgue@alaska.gov.

* * * * *

Northern Flows

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