

Thesis Internship: The development of the MI WARN program, phase 1

under the direction of Robert F. Babcock

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Introduction

My internship project was with the Water Division at the MI DEQ and AWWA (American Water Works Association). This project was fueled by the Homeland Security Presidential Directive (HSPD) #9 that says, "This effort will include countermeasure research and development of new methods for detection, prevention technologies, agent characterization, and dose response relationships for high-consequence agents in the food and the water supply."



In the middle of a water security crisis such as an attack against a water treatment plant or contamination of the drinking water, the utility will be of intense interest. Risk communication during such emergencies will directly influence events. Poor communication can fan emotions and undermine public trust and confidence at best, and at worst, incite high tensions, misinformation, and additional crises that need to be handled. Good risk communication can rally support, calm a nervous public, provide needed information, encourage cooperative behaviors, and potentially help save lives.

The Michigan DEQ has been actively pursuing measures that will meet this criteria to help the utility companies of Michigan to be better prepared in the event of mass disaster. Not far from my home town, Detroit operates the largest water and wastewater utility in Michigan and is the 3rd largest in the U.S., Detroit's plant alone serves 4.3 million people in 126 communities in nine counties. The size of that particular facility feeds to millions of people is a very important reason that Michigan is developing the WARN program. Detroit is merely one city along the Great Lakes lake front that will be in communication with other utilities that will need the WARN program to effectively distribute help requests, when it is needed.

There are ten (10) basic steps that I was involved in the first phase of WARN development:

1. Identify interest in starting a program
2. Form an initial leadership team
3. Prepare a kick-off session
4. Establish a steering committee
5. Identify a mission for the program and steering committee goals
6. Review use of State regions
7. Identify mutual aid and assistance activation criteria
8. Draft and agreement
9. Create facilitation tools
10. Maintain the program into next phases



Correspondence emailing with other WARN programs, keeping in touch with MI WARN committee members as well as a plethora of other utilities dictated by Bob.

What is WARN ??

Water/Wastewater Agency Response Network (WARN):

A WARN is a network of utilities within a State that have adopted an agreement to provide aid to other utilities during natural and human caused disasters. It is a system designed to facilitate a utilities-helping-utilities approach to providing assistance during times of crisis. To date, the States of California, Florida, Texas, Louisiana, South Carolina, Washington, and Oregon have formally established WARN programs.

By establishing mutual aid agreements before a crisis occurs, WARN participants pave the way for member utilities within (and outside) of their respective states to send valuable aid in a quick and efficient manner.

WARN participants can access specialized resources to assess and assist water and wastewater systems until such time as the system can develop a permanent operating solution.



There are several Federal initiatives supporting the development of WARN's in each State including HSPD-5 Management of Domestic Incidents, HSPD-7 Critical Infrastructure and HSPD-8 National Preparedness Goal. Within HSPD-5 are the National Incident Management System (NIMS) and the National Response Plan (NRP). Full compliance with NIMS will be an eligibility condition of all Federal preparedness assistance grants for State, territorial, tribal and local entities by FY 2007. It also includes formalization of mutual aid agreements with surrounding communities and States for the purposes of sharing equipment, personnel and facilities during emergencies. Benefits of the WARN program include increased planning and coordination, extensive emergency contact lists, enhanced access to specialized resources, local and community help, expedited arrival of FEMA aid, reduced administrative conflict and increased recovery hope.

Current Issues with MI WARN program

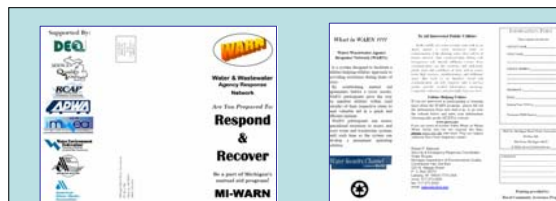
- Approximately 22 utilities have expressed interest
- There is a possible universe of >11,000 utilities
- Collecting electronic info at MRWA of expressions of interest as interim
- 1,000 pamphlets printed; approximately 400 mailed out to largest public water and wastewater systems
- Steering cte of MI WARN deliberating on web host server
- State of Michigan, ie, MDEQ and DIT, offer a www.michigan.gov/miwarn web site as a possibility
- Costs for development seem small if any, but, maintenance costs may be an issue

Things I worked on at the DEQ

- ✓ Getting to know the other WARN sites
~ emailing California, Florida, Texas, Louisiana on info to begin WARN process
- ✓ Helping Bob cut through "red-tape" of the warn.org issues
- ✓ Contact WARN personnel to get a copy of the WARN program set up for MI
- ✓ Talking to web host crews
- ✓ Finding a web host for MI WARN
- ✓ Reading up on WARN program and making contact with steering committee of WARN
- ✓ Attending and taking notes at WARN meetings
- ✓ Creating spread sheets, Excel documents, power points for presentations
- ✓ Developing informational WARN Flyer (see below)
- ✓ Helping MI RWA set up database to collect utilities information
- ✓ Attended AWWA, MI WARN committee meetings, Security Summit, and web casts
- ✓ Writing official letters to Water Utilities and Association Officials



Program Advisor, Bob Babcock, and I at the Water Security Summit in Lansing distributing WARN flyer and discussing MI WARN program with interested utilities and other officials present.



Completed WARN Flyer



Online Water Security
The Water Information Sharing and Analysis Center (WaterISAC) is the most comprehensive and up-to-the-minute online resource of security and disaster preparedness information for America's drinking water and wastewater utilities. It provides a unique link between the water sector and federal environmental, homeland security, law enforcement, intelligence and public health agencies.

This service updates all WARN programs being established and all ready in use. It is useful because members can utilize this site for updated knowledge of water security from numerous federal and nation water branches, as well as find out what is happening in other states.

For further information go to:

http://www.michigan.gov/deq/0,1607,7-135-3313_23413-161032--,00.html