



Talking Points: State Department of Health Drinking Water Infrastructure Protection

Introduction: The recent terrorist attacks in New York and Washington D.C. have raised many concerns about security in the United States and worldwide. While drinking water facilities could become targets for disruption—by terrorists, vandals or individuals acting alone—there is also a potential for rumors and unfounded fears that could be almost as incapacitating as a real attack.

The department has heard no reports of incidents or increased risks to water systems, but with recent national events, there is increased media interest in public safety issues. These talking points are for use in fielding potential media calls about the safety of our drinking water system.

Issues:

- Drinking water systems are a vital part of our infrastructure and must be protected on an ongoing basis from contamination. Standards are in place to design, operate, maintain, and monitor water systems on a regular basis to protect the public's health.
- Contamination can occur through natural means or intentional acts.
- Standard drinking water system protections in place include: routine monitoring for biological and chemical contaminants; 24-hour state emergency contact for state program notification; emergency response section required for all water system plans; emergency response procedure fact sheets distributed to all systems; agency authority to order corrections and suspensions.
- Actions within last two weeks include: additional fact sheets provided to state water suppliers regarding security and threat reduction; heightened staff knowledge and awareness. Additional statewide training for water systems on emergency preparedness is currently being planned.
- We have no information that there are currently any increased risks or threats to water systems in this country.
- We receive regular communications from the FBI's National Infrastructure Protection Center and are kept well informed of any potential threats to our drinking water systems.
- We will always rely on—and work with—our law enforcement community as a key mechanism to stop and prevent terrorist activities.
- As is our standard procedure, we will continue to share information with public water supply operators in order to keep drinking water supplies secure and protected.
- In response to recent national events, the public health system is heightening its surveillance of unusual illness occurrences, laboratory capacity, and emergency response capabilities so that we can limit the impact of any potential problems through quick response.
- Unfounded rumors and fears around the safety of drinking water supplies can be almost as incapacitating to a community as real problems. The DOH has always been committed to responsibly communicating accurate information, and understands the special challenges of that effort during these times of heightened public interest and concern.

For information call Communications Director Tim Church, 360-236-4077; or Media Relations Manager Donn Moyer, 360-236-4076.