

Integrating WARN and Other Mutual Aid Agreements

BACKGROUND

In February 2006, eight major water organizations signed the *Joint Policy Statement on Mutual Aid and Assistance Networks*, encouraging utilities and local/state governments to establish intrastate mutual aid and assistance networks. The organizations committed to the “Utilities Helping Utilities” concept and encouraged their members to join mutual aid and assistance networks, such as Water/Wastewater Agency Response Networks (WARN).

In addition to WARN, utilities often participate in one-on-one agreements with neighboring utilities, as well as public agency statewide mutual aid and assistance programs. Participating in multiple agreements provides utilities with flexibility in evaluating the most effective and efficient means of obtaining resources during an emergency.

OTHER AGREEMENTS AND WARN

Unlike typical statewide mutual aid agreements, WARN membership can include both public and private utilities. By adopting the WARN approach to mutual aid and assistance, drinking water and wastewater utilities in each state are able to sign a single agreement covering issues such as indemnification, workers’ compensation, and reimbursement. The agreement allows utilities to share equipment, personnel, and other resources.

WARN recognizes the need for member utilities to manage existing agreements with local, neighboring utilities, statewide programs, and interstate programs.

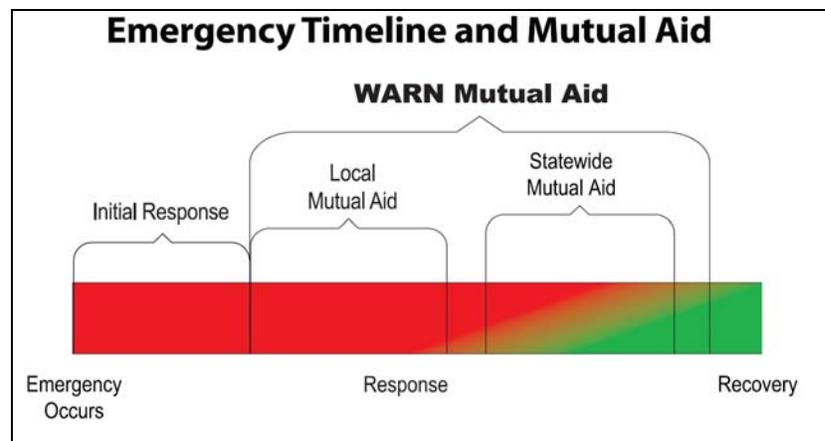
Utilities may participate in these and other agreements, and retain full WARN membership; serve on the various WARN committees and subcommittees; as well as serve as the WARN Chair, if elected to the position. Utilities that participate in other agreements can also request or send resources through their WARN during an emergency, but are not obligated to do so, as is true for all WARN members.

EMERGENCY TIMELINE AND MUTUAL AID

During an emergency, a utility must determine what resources it needs and evaluate the options available to obtain those resources. This may include three possible mutual aid or assistance mechanisms:

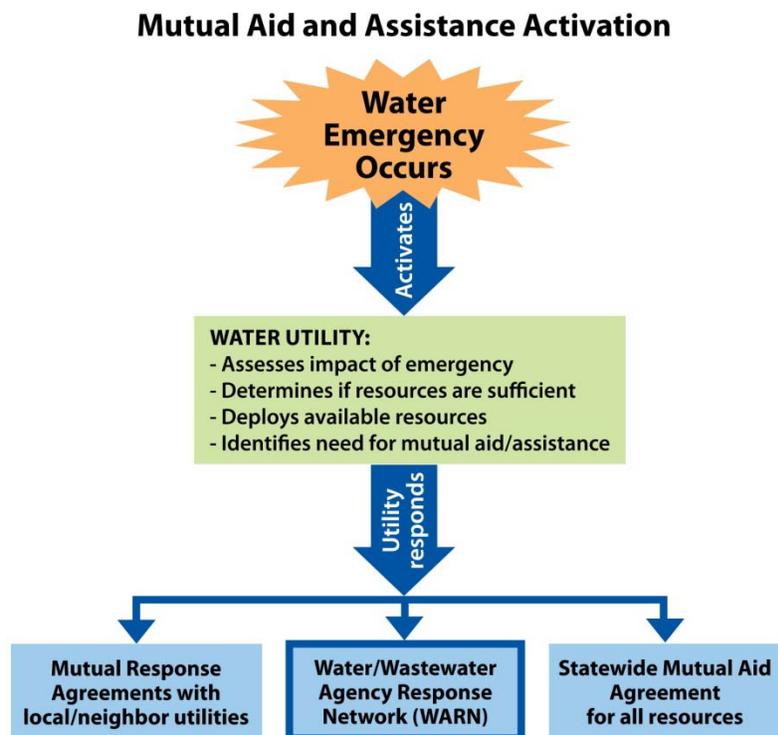
- (1) Activate existing local agreements or contact neighboring utilities with which they have pre-written agreements.
- (2) Access a public agency statewide mutual aid program.
- (3) Access WARN resources, if the utility is a member. By activating WARN, a utility can reduce the response “gap” between local and statewide

mutual aid, and can sustain access to resources into the recovery phase, while this may not be the case with other options.



INTEGRATED RESPONSE EFFORTS

Depending on the complexity of an emergency, response actions may consist of accessing multiple mutual aid and assistance agreements concurrently. WARN is structured to accommodate this and past responses have demonstrated how effectively this can work:



- *Easter Earthquake, California (2010)* – CalWARN members responded as a mutual aid task force under both the CalWARN agreement and the State Master Mutual Aid Agreement to staff the utility, county, and state emergency operations centers.
- *Water Contamination Incident, Alamosa, Colorado, (2008)* – Resources from CoWARN and other mutual aid networks (Rural Water and the Mid-America Alliance) provided sampling expertise and resources for flushing and disinfecting the water system.

COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT WARN

FALSE	TRUE
WARN membership precludes participation in other mutual aid and assistance agreements, or using resources from contractors or associations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The <i>Joint Policy Statement</i> signed by the wastewater and water organizations supports mutual aid and assistance networks of all kinds; the WARN program is not the only option ➤ WARN encourages member utilities to access local agreements and statewide programs, and does not attempt to replace them ➤ WARN member utilities can participate in other mutual aid and assistance agreements
WARN obligates members to send resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ No member is obligated to send resources if they decide not to for any reason
WARN membership is expensive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Most existing WARNs do not require a membership or retainer fee ➤ All member utilities volunteer time to develop and maintain their WARN
Putting the WARN agreement through legal review is cost-prohibitive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Some states' Attorneys General have reviewed the WARN agreement, in addition to legal experts from numerous drinking water and wastewater utilities, and additional review may not be necessary

FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Additional information is available through outreach products developed by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to aid utilities in the development of mutual aid and assistance networks. To learn more, please contact Nushat Thomas of EPA (thomas.nushat@epa.gov) or Jenny Thomas of EPA (thomas.jenny@epa.gov). Additional information is also available at: <http://water.epa.gov/infrastructure/watersecurity/mutualaid/index.cfm>