



At a Glance

Why We Did This Review

We conducted this review to determine how the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA): (1) ensures that its efforts and initiatives are safeguarding the nation's drinking water supply from attacks and natural disasters; and (2) addressed recommendations and suggestions from prior evaluations of the water security program.

Over 297 million people in the United States were served by 51,460 community water systems as of September 2010. The September 11, 2001, attacks prompted a national effort to secure critical infrastructure and resources, including drinking water. Since the 2001 attacks, there have also been a number of natural disasters, such as Hurricanes Katrina and Irene. These events have threatened individual drinking water systems, resulting in unsafe drinking water and shortages.

This report addresses the following EPA Goal or Cross-Cutting Strategy:

- *Protecting America's waters.*

For further information, contact our Office of Congressional and Public Affairs at (202) 566-2391.

The full report is at:
www.epa.gov/oig/reports/2013/20130821-13-P-0349.pdf

EPA Can Better Address Risks to the Security of the Nation's Drinking Water Through New Authorities, Plans, and Information

What We Found

EPA has implemented a number of activities to promote the security of drinking water systems. However, strategic planning and internal controls for the water security program need to be strengthened to allow the Agency to measure the program's performance and progress in drinking water systems' preparedness, prevention, response, and recovery capabilities. EPA's strategic planning in this area is hampered by its limited authority over water security, the voluntary nature of its water security activities, and concerns related to protecting information. These impediments could be overcome by the water security program utilizing available data; using alternative methods to gather data; and seeking additional authority from Congress to collect, protect, and utilize information from water systems. EPA should also expand its internal controls to meet Federal Managers' Financial Integrity Act requirements.

EPA has made progress improving water security by taking corrective actions based on the recommendations and suggestions from prior evaluations. However, the Agency has not fully addressed three Office of Inspector General (OIG) suggestions to establish a baseline and measure improvements, despite agreeing with OIG's assessment. Additional work remains for EPA, as the lead federal agency for the water sector, to enhance its efforts to manage the water security program and help reduce risks to drinking water systems and the public.

Recommendations and Planned Agency Corrective Actions

We recommend that EPA develop a comprehensive strategic plan, assess water security by gathering available data and incorporating measures into national guidance, and improve internal controls by developing a program review strategy and a multi-year review plan. We also recommend that EPA seek additional authority from Congress and utilize the authority, if granted, to develop a baseline and outcome measures. EPA initially agreed with four recommendations in the draft report. After further discussions with the Agency, the OIG modified the three remaining recommendations to seek additional authority and develop a baseline and outcome measures. As a result of these discussions and modifications, the Agency has also concurred with the remaining recommendations. The recommendations are resolved with corrective actions underway.

Noteworthy Achievements

EPA developed the Water Security Initiative and Water Laboratory Alliance. The Agency also supported the establishment of many intrastate mutual aid and assistance agreements called Water/Wastewater Agency Response Networks.