

Summary of the December 2-3, 1998 Meeting of the Health Care Providers Outreach and Education Work Group

Held in Washington, D.C.

The Health Care Provider Outreach and Education Working Group of the National Drinking Water Advisory Council (NDWAC) held its first meeting December 2-3, 1998. This summary outlines the principal objectives and topics discussed at the meeting. Official minutes will be developed and released at a later date.

I. BACKGROUND

The Safe Drinking Water Act (SDWA) Amendments of 1996 calls for strengthening of ties between the communities of drinking water managers and health care providers. Section 1458.(d), for example, specifies:

(2) Training and Education - The Director [of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention] and Administrator [of EPA] shall jointly establish a national health care provider training and public education campaign to inform both the professional health care provider community and the general public about waterborne disease and the symptoms that may be caused by infectious agents, including microbial contaminants. In developing such a campaign, they shall seek comment from interested groups and individuals, including scientists, physicians, State and local governments, environmental groups, public water systems, and vulnerable populations.

This provision identifies two "audiences": the public and health care providers. EPA is embarking on several endeavors to inform the public about drinking water concerns, in particular those related to the Public Right-to-Know provisions, via a separate NDWAC working group. EPA is now beginning to define the needs of the health care provider community for drinking water information. The NDWAC, a group chartered under FACA, requested the formation of a Working Group to help identify the messages, outreach products, and delivery mechanisms to effectively target this health care providers. A wide range in views and concerns is reflected in work group membership, which ranges from primary care physicians, to environmental activists, to research scientists, to water utility managers.

II. MAJOR ISSUES RAISED AND ADDRESSED AT THE MEETING

Framing the Issues: After members introduced themselves, Ron Hoffer of EPA's Office of Ground Water and Drinking Water (OGWDW) gave an overview of the Safe Drinking Water Act provisions relevant to the working group's mission, and led a discussion highlighting several concepts the group would be discussing during the two days.

Coordination with Right To Know Working Group: Margie Jones (OGWDW) gave a report from on the Right to Know Working Group and NDWAC's recommendations to EPA regarding Right to Know. The group discussed the role of the Health Care Provider Working Group vis-a-vis the Right to Know Working Group. The group agreed that coordination was appropriate, with the principal responsibility at this time resting with the NDWAC representatives to each working group. Joint meetings of the working groups may be held in the future if needed.

What Do We Know About Drinking Water Contaminants and Human Health?: Rebecca Calderon, of EPA's Office of Research and Development, and working group member Dennis Juranek of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), gave presentations on acute and chronic health concerns;

EPA/CDC national estimate of waterborne disease occurrence; and considerations for sensitive subpopulations. The presentations began to give the working group members a common base of understanding from which to begin deliberating some of the key issues.

Snapshots: Working group members presented case studies of information campaigns used by cities in their efforts to respond to water treatment and/or quality problems. The cities discussed were Milwaukee, New York City, and San Francisco. Participants discussed what worked and what did not in various situations, offered suggestions and raised specific questions.

Mission, Messages, and Communications Approaches: The group discussed its mission statement, which focuses largely on developing a strategy for meeting health care provider needs regarding drinking water. It will agree on a final text at its January conference call (to be scheduled). Members also identified some messages, audiences, tools used to convey messages, and the extent to which messages or products should be tailored to different audiences. They plan to continue discussing these issues at the January conference call.

III. NEXT STEPS

A subgroup was formed (EPA, AWWA, working group members) to review materials under development regarding Consumer Confidence Reports, and to prepare a presentation that members of the working group can use in their own work over the next few months.

A conference call will be convened in late January for working group members to comment on the meeting summary, review the subgroup's work, determine if there are additional materials to develop, and agree upon dates for the next working group meeting.