

Water Laboratory Alliance Response Plan

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Water Laboratory Alliance (WLA) provides the Water Sector with an integrated nationwide network of laboratories. WLA Members have the capabilities and capacity to analyze water samples in the event of natural, intentional or unintentional water contamination incidents involving chemical, biological or radiochemical contaminants. The *Water Laboratory Alliance Response Plan (WLA-RP)* is a key component of the WLA. The WLA-RP provides a comprehensive, national approach to coordinating emergency response to water contamination incidents that require analytical support. This plan includes Water Sector best practices that help sustain preparedness of laboratories, utilities, emergency managers and other Water Sector stakeholders involved in water contamination incidents.



What is the Overall Goal of the WLA-RP?

The goal of the WLA-RP is to improve Water Sector preparedness for responding to water contamination incidents that require analytical support. Finalized in 2010, the WLA-RP is the result of best practices and lessons learned from 11 Regional Laboratory Response Plans. These plans were tested and refined through functional exercises, by each of the ten EPA regions and Hawaii.

The WLA-RP provides the Water Sector with a structure for a systematic, coordinated response to water contamination incidents. This approach can be used in conjunction with existing Incident Command System structures and procedures. The WLA-RP also provides best practices to meet analytical needs of an incident, including:

- Sample brokerage and tracking.
- Communication.
- Coordination of analyses.
- Recommendations for minimum QA and QC.
- Analyte-specific methods.
- Data review and reporting.

The WLA-RP can be accessed at https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2015-08/documents/water_laboratory_alliance_response_plan.pdf.

What are the Benefits to the Water Sector?

- The WLA-RP provides best practices for coordination of local, state and federal laboratory efforts to meet analytical needs. Using WLA-RP procedures helps stakeholders to respond more quickly and efficiently to an incident.
- The WLA-RP includes procedures that have been tested and refined through Analytical Preparedness Full-Scale Exercises (AP-FSEs). These exercises increase Water Sector preparedness to respond to water contamination incidents by providing the opportunity to practice WLA-RP and internal procedures and identifying areas of improvement. The AP-FSEs also help strengthen relationships between Water Sector stakeholders; a critical factor for successful emergency response.
- The WLA-RP also serves as the foundation of the WLA by addressing relevant issues such as coordination of communication, analytical method selection, and secure data transfer.

The WLA-RP was developed to provide flexibility regardless of the scale of the response. It can be used to coordinate laboratory response for multi-regional incidents requiring support from many laboratories. It can also be used for responses involving a single laboratory.

How are WLA-RP Best Practices Implemented?

EPA is committed to helping sustain Water Sector preparedness by implementing WLA-RP best practices through AP-FSEs, tabletop exercises, and online WLA Training Center opportunities. For additional information, visit the WLA Training Center at <https://www.epa.gov/waterlabnetwork/water-laboratory-alliance-training-center>.

Analytical Preparedness Full-Scale Exercises

In order to increase use of WLA-RP best practices and enhance communication in the Water Sector, EPA conducts AP-FSEs in multi-regional and utility-led formats. Multi-regional exercises require coordination in response to mock, large-scale incidents, requiring dozens of laboratories and are generally led by EPA regions. These AP-FSEs allow participants to practice supporting a combined environmental and public health incident.

Utility-led AP-FSEs provide the opportunity for utilities to play the key coordination role. These smaller-scale exercises ensure that utilities are knowledgeable about WLA procedures, tools and resources available to support water contamination incidents. As all emergency responses begin locally, utility-led exercises are vitally important to practice a more localized chain of command.

AP-FSEs involve actual sample analyses, communication, coordination and data reporting. Exercises have several major objectives including:

- Providing a venue for participants to utilize WLA-RP best practices.
- Using the WLA-RP concurrent with Incident Command System practices and procedures.
- Practicing communication and coordination with other stakeholders that may be involved with a response.

Tabletop Exercises

EPA conducts tabletop exercises that are designed to increase the participants' knowledge of the WLA-RP and Water Security tools and resources. During these discussion-based exercises, participants address situations and questions related to a water contamination scenario, drawing from their real-life experiences and knowledge. Participants learn about the roles and responsibilities of utilities, laboratories and other stakeholders during a response to a water contamination incident. These exercises also help participants build relationships with potential response partners that are key to successful emergency response.

WLA-RP Training Module

The training module provides an overview of the WLA-RP in an interactive, scenario-based training. Participants learn about the best practices included in the WLA-RP. The training module can be accessed at <https://www.epa.gov/waterlabnetwork/water-laboratory-alliance-response-plan>.

AP-FSE Participating Organizations

- State public health and environmental laboratories.
- Drinking water and wastewater utilities.
- EPA regions.
- State and local health departments.
- State primacy agencies.
- Civil Support Teams.
- Local, state and federal first responders.
- FBI.
- Law enforcement.
- Integrated Consortium of Laboratory Networks including EPA's Environmental Response Laboratory Network (ERLN)/WLA, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Laboratory Response Network (LRN), and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration and U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food Emergency Response Network (FERN).

For additional information on the WLA-RP, contact the WLA Helpline at 703-461-2400 or WLA@epa.gov, or visit the WLA homepage at <https://www.epa.gov/waterlabnetwork>.