

MnWARN - Mutual Aid

“Utilities Helping Utilities”

Mutual aid agreements are nothing new. We've all seen them in operation, a convoy of power company utility trucks carrying transformers and poles heading to assist another company in time of need, a fire department fighting a major fire with assistance from other fire departments. Long ago, organizations such as these recognized that their resources were limited and they could not do it alone during major emergencies. Electric utilities and fire departments require trained personnel and special equipment and materials in order to operate properly. Furthermore, public health and well-being are contingent on how well these organizations respond to an emergency and restore normal operations.

Does this sound familiar? It should. How important to public health and well-being is clean drinking water and wastewater collection and treatment? How specialized are water and wastewater systems? How much training is required to operate, maintain, and repair water and wastewater systems? Could a water or wastewater system do it alone?

Enter: **Water and Wastewater Agency Response Network (WARN)**

So what exactly is WARN? The following are FAQs from the website of WARN Central.
<http://www.watersc.org/warn.html>

1. What is Mutual Aid/Assistance?

Mutual Aid/Assistance is one agency helping another based on a written agreement. The assistance is provided across jurisdictional boundaries in the event of an emergency.

2. What is WARN?

A Water and Wastewater Agency Response Network is a network of utilities helping utilities to respond to and recover from emergencies.

- Participation is voluntary.
- There is no obligation to respond.
- There is no cost to participate.

3. What is the purpose of a WARN?

A WARN establishes an agreement and protocols for sharing resources among water and wastewater utilities statewide.

A WARN provides a forum for establishing and maintaining emergency contacts.

A WARN provides access to specialized resources needed to respond to emergencies at water and wastewater systems.

A WARN can facilitate training that specifically focuses on the exchange of resources during an emergency or drill.

4. Why is a WARN important?

Utility resources are specialized.

Utilities must be self-sufficient.

Utilities must fill the gap before the arrival of government aid.

5. What does a WARN program provide a utility?

Access to specialized, certified, and knowledgeable utility personnel.

Access to heavy equipment, tools, and supplies used by utilities during normal events.

6. What are the benefits of a WARN?

There is no cost to participate.

WARN is like investing in a no cost insurance policy to access resources when needed.

WARN increases emergency preparedness and coordination.

WARN enhances access to specialized resources.

WARN provides a single agreement to access resources statewide.

WARN expedites arrival of aid (don't have to work out the administrative items; the agreements and WARN protocols work them out in advance for you).

WARN agreement contains indemnification and worker's compensation provisions to protect participating utilities and provide reimbursement protocols.

7. How does a utility get assistance during an emergency?

Currently, each WARN system works differently depending on previous agreements.

Initial access may be made directly to other members or through an identified coordination point.

As a result of the contact, WARN members are able to match the equipment, skilled labor, and other resources needed with resources other members have available by querying a database, calling members, or using an internet message board to locate resources.

Each WARN also provides facilitation in collecting damage assessment and locating resources as needs.

Public utilities may also access other resources through local, state, and federal agencies.

8. Are member utilities required to respond and send resources?

There is no obligation to respond but depending on your workload and level of expertise adequate response is what makes this program successful.

Mutual Aid (Utilities Helping Utilities)

Continued

9. What happens if a utility sends resources and needs them back?

Under no circumstances should a utility send resources if it impacts their ability to manage daily operations or response to its own emergency.

It is up to the lending utility to determine what resources to send.

Resources remain under the authority of the sending utility, and as such can be recalled any time.

10. What happens if equipment on loan is damaged or stolen?

This may depend on your state's mutual aid/assistance agreement; the lending utility is typically responsible to have insurance in case this happens.

11. Are mutual aid and assistance activities eligible for FEMA reimbursement?

It is important to understand how the FEMA programs work and understand how they apply to mutual aid/assistance in advance. Some key considerations for FEMA reimbursement include:

The assistance is requested by the Applicant;

The work performed is directly related to the disaster and is otherwise eligible for FEMA assistance;

The entity can provide documentation of rates and payment for services, if requested; and

The agreement is written and was in effect prior to the disaster.

12. Will a utility be reimbursed for the use of their resources?

This depends upon the terms that the lending and borrowing utilities agree upon.

In some cases during a federally declared disaster, FEMA may provide reimbursement for equipment, fuel, and personnel used in a disaster.

13. How is WARN different from a statewide mutual aid program?

Statewide mutual aid/assistance agreements frequently require a declaration of a "local emergency" to activate the agreement, WARN agreements do not require declaration of an emergency, saving critical time in response.

Statewide programs do not include private utilities, WARN agreements do.

For aid to cross state lines, a presidential declaration is usually required; WARN agreements do not have that limitation, but require coordination with state emergency management.

14. Is help available for disasters other than hurricanes?

WARN is available in all types of emergencies.

WARN members can receive assistance anytime their system needs emergency assistance.

15. Who should be involved in helping develop a WARN?

Utility owner/operators

Professional association representation

State water and wastewater primary agency (State health, environmental protection, etc.)

State emergency management and/or homeland security agency

US EPA region representation

16. What help is available to form a WARN?

AWWA has published a White Paper

AWWA will be holding workshops across the country EPA can help with post workshop remote support on a case by case basis, depending on available funding and the specific needs of the program. Support could include facilitation of meetings and workshops, administrative support, and answer technical questions.

17. What about setting up an interstate mutual aid program?

Currently the Emergency Management Assistance Compact (EMAC) is being used by all fifty states to share aid across state lines. The water sector will be working with the administrators of EMAC to ensure that it can be used effectively for the water sector.

California, Texas and Florida are three examples of states with a WARN agreement in place. Many other states are at various stages of development towards a WARN agreement.

Minnesota held a seminar on April 26, 2007 that was sponsored by American Water Works Association and the Minnesota Department of Health and funded by EPA.

A steering committee for Minnesota has been formed. The committee will be reviewing a draft agreement in the near future. The agreement can be viewed on the MnWARN website @ www.mnwarn.org . Soon the Steering Committee will be selecting regional representatives to serve on the State Committee for implementation of the MnWARN program. Anyone interested in serving in this capacity can contact Pete Moulton at the Saint Peter Utilities (507) 934-0670 ext. 774, or by email at petem@saintpetermn.gov