U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's WARN Program: Summary of Insights

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Why was the WARN program formed?

- Certain events in the early 2000s (9/11, Hurricane Katrina, etc.) emphasized the need for water and wastewater utilities to share resources to overcome local/regional disasters
- This resulted in an effort from water sector professional associations in the U.S. (with support from the EPA's Water Security Division) to encourage utilities to establish **"intrastate mutual aid and assistance agreements between both drinking water and wastewater utilities"** – these agreements are the foundational basis of the WARN program
- WARN was established to create a mutual aid and assistance network for water and wastewater utilities and allow them to **quickly obtain help in the form of personnel, equipment, materials and associated services from other utilities**
- **The goal is to enable utilities to restore critical operations impacted during any type of emergency**

What is WARN?

- WARN: Water/Wastewater Agency Response Networks
- WARN is the formal acronym that refers to the intrastate mutual aid and assistance agreements between drinking water and wastewater utilities
- The program was established in 2006
- These agreements use a **"utility-driven model to facilitate an effective and efficient flow of personal and resources after an emergency"**
- The effort was primarily grassroots and driven by utilities, with support from EPA and AWWA
- WARN membership is open to both public and private utilities
- WARNs currently exist in 49 of the 50 states as well as the National Capital Region
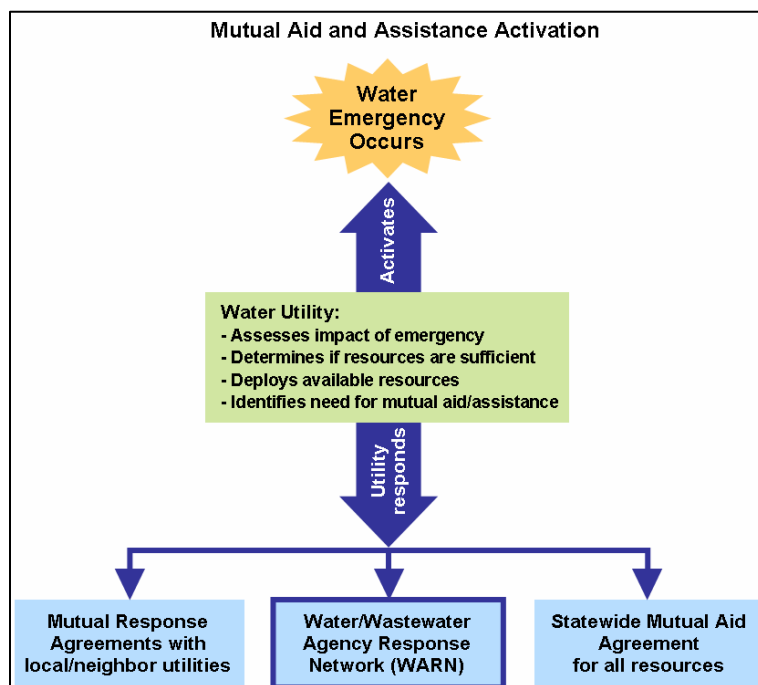
Who are the key stakeholders in the implementation of WARN?

- The WARN approach is quite integrated – several stakeholders are involved in its implementation, including:
    - Utility owner/operators (key participants/implementers)
    - State water and wastewater primacy agencies (advisors/supporting role in implementation)
    - State emergency management/homeland security agencies (help integrate WARN into state programs)
    - Water sector professional associations (signed a joint policy statement on mutual aid and assistance titled "Utilities Helping Utilities" to promote programs such as WARN). Below is the list of associations who signed the policy statement.
        - American Water Works Association (AWWA)
        - National Rural Water Association (NRWA)
        - Water Environment Federation (WEF)
        - Association of Metropolitan Water Agencies (AMWA)
        - Association of State Drinking Water Administrators (ASDWA)
        - National Association of Clean Water Agencies (NACWA)
        - National Association of Water Companies (NAWC)
        - Association of State and Interstate Water Pollution Control Administrators (ASIWPCA)
- Below is a figure showing the interaction pathways among the stakeholders when WARN is activated
  Source: https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2015-08/documents/warn_fact_sheet.pdf

What are the benefits of an approach like WARN?
- The WARN approach allows drinking water and wastewater utilities in each state to sign a single agreement covering issues such as indemnification, workers' compensation and reimbursement – essentially fast-tracking mutual aid and assistance after an emergency
- The WARN agreement allows utilities to share equipment, personnel and other resources which may be needed to respond effectively to any crisis
- For utilities in the U.S., WARN reduces the response gap between local agreements and the activation of statewide agreements because it does not require an emergency declaration prior to its activation
    - o The approach essentially expedites access to resources needed to respond to and recover from crises that disrupt water/wastewater utilities

Changes to WARN post-implementation
- Initially, WARN was focused on *intrastate* networks. However, following implementation, it was recognized that *interstate* mutual aid and assistance agreements may be needed to share resources across state lines
    - o EPA and WARN partners have explored the use of mechanisms like the National Emergency Management Agency's (NEMA) Emergency Management Assistance Compact (EMAC) to meet this objective
    - o EPA developed an outreach document – EMAC Tips for the Water Sector – which includes information that utilities could apply to use EMAC more effectively when requesting/providing mutual aid and assistance across state lines
    - o A current version of this outreach document on EMAC can be accessed here: https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2017-02/documents/170127_epa-emac_factsheet_508c.pdf
    - o EMAC provides the following support to utilities in the U.S.:
        - Provides the means to deploy utility assets across state lines quickly and effectively during a declared emergency
        - Provides liability and other legal protections for deployed utility staff and equipment
        - Provides reciprocity for licenses and certifications during deployment
- The success of the WARN program within the first year of its implementation led to a ***need to validate the processes and protocols*** utilized during the activation and implementation of WARN
    - o EPA responded by providing tabletop exercises and a protocols guidance document
    - o Tabletop exercises helped WARN members coordinate more effectively with state and local emergency management agencies, state primacy agencies and federal agencies
    - o The exercises also helped the participating utilities and agencies to define their roles and responsibilities more precisely and realistically

Other notes
- The model agreement implemented by WARN is recognized as a "Model Agreement" by the DHS/FEMA National Integration Center (NIC) Incident Management Systems Division

For Consideration: WARN Parallels in Canada

- Institutional agencies such as Saskatchewan's Water Security Agency, Ontario's Walkerton Clean Water Centre, as well as the crown corporations SaskWater and Ontario Clean Water Agency provide services to a number of municipalities across their respective provinces, as well as resources to operators in water security planning (Moncrieff-Gould et al., 2017).
- Some elements for training, network development, etc. may be gleaned from the Government of Canada's Indigenous Services' Circuit Rider Training Program for First Nation community water operators (Government of Canada, 2015).

References

All the information below was gathered from the following sources:

- EPA WARN webpage: https://www.epa.gov/waterutilityresponse/mutual-aid-and-assistance-drinking-water-and-wastewater-utilities
- EPA WARN fact sheet: https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2015-08/documents/warn_fact_sheet.pdf
- Moncrieff-Gould, G., Quigley, K., & Burns, C. (2017). Strengthening the resilience of the Canadian water sector. Retrieved from https://cdn.dal.ca/content/dam/dalhousie/pdf/dept/maceachen-institute/REPORT%20-%20Stregthening%20the%20Resilience%20of%20the%20Canadian%20Water%20Sector.pdf
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