

# The Western Coalition of Arid States

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Testimony of Western Coalition of Arid States (WESTCAS)  
Submitted (for the record) to the Committee on Appropriations

Subcommittee, Interior & Related Agencies

Regarding FY07 Environmental Protection Agency Budget

April 30, 2006

The Western Coalition of Arid States (WESTCAS) is submitting this testimony regarding the Presidents FY 2007 budget request for the United States Environmental Protection Agency.

WESTCAS is a coalition of approximately 125 water and wastewater districts, cities and towns and professional organizations focused on water quality and water quantity issues in the States of Arizona, California, Colorado, Idaho, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon and Texas. Our mission is to work with Federal, State and Regional water quality and quantity agencies to promote scientifically-sound law, regulations, appropriations and policies that protect public health in the environment of the arid West.

Most citizens of the United States consider the public safety departments to be police and fire. Yet when these people come into their lives it is usually do to a personal catastrophe or problem. Yet water service providers are their every day. It is a service that is taken for granted until it is not available. People providing water services truly are a part of public safety and the Environmental Protection Agency provides the rules, regulations, tools and often funding to ensure that this public safety item is one which the residents of the United States can trust.

Providing clean, safe water services to citizens is not just a function of the members of WESTCAS it is the mission of each and passion of each of its members. The proposed decrease of greater than twenty percent in Water Protection funding could greatly impair the ability of State, Local and Regional representatives to support EPA's goal of increasing drinking water standards to 89-95% of the population and increasing shellfish growing areas from 77 to 91%.

*The Voice of Water Quality in the Arid West*

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EPA's decision to move forward on the Total Coliform Rule, developing ways of comprehensive contamination warning systems, and requiring the reduction of vessel discharges and invasive species will assist organizations in providing services to residents. WESTCAS supports these budget initiatives. Databases provide critical information to all users. The Safe Drinking Water Information System (SIDWIS) is used by Federal, State, Local agencies and public interest groups. Ensuring this data is accurate is crucial. As this database is expanded to allow the regulated community to directly input and update their information the EPA will have data with fewer inconsistencies.

State Revolving Funding programs provide low cost loans and grants to ensure drinking water and wastewater regulations are met. The needs surveys indicate that funding needs are increasing not decreasing. The proposed reductions to the State Revolving Fund program will cause a dramatic reduction in infrastructure programs. The current Clean Water Needs Survey provided to Congress identifies billions in need that directly affect water safety. WESTCAS supports increasing the SRF program funding to its original level.

Ensuring the aquifer is protected provides security to all residents. Leaking underground storage facilities, illegal dumping and mismanagement of land application products can lead to contamination of this vital resource. WESTCAS therefore supports EPA's superfund program and the pursuance of cost recoveries.

The border of Mexico is great interest to WESTCAS as many of its members are a border state. EPA's "build a partnership work group for Mexico" is an area that WESTCAS would like to offer as a partnership opportunity. WESTCAS members are familiar with the terrain, complications in sighting wells, and wastewater challenges. At this time WESTCAS supports this initiative and welcomes the opportunity to assist in this process and would appreciate consideration to be part of the work group.

EPA has recognized the need to cultivate its own employees. American Water Works Association and Water Environment Federation have identified the need for additional utility workers in the future. Operators are retiring at an alarming rate and due to the need to be competitive, training opportunities for grade 1 and 2 operators are limited. This is causing a regional and national decrease in available workers with the required skill sets to run water and wastewater facilities. EPA's decision to eliminate funding for operator training will increase this problem. Therefore, WESTCAS is requesting that EPA evaluate this decision and its long term effects on future operations of facilities.

Budget development and allotment of funding is a challenge and one which requires a great deal of introspection within the organization. WESTCAS appreciates the opportunity to provide testimony on this complex task.

Thank you for considering our request.

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