



washington dc update

Safe Drinking Water Act Hearings

December 10, 2009

Factoids from EPA's testimony:

- About 1,000 systems are currently in violation of the arsenic rule, 75% of them serving fewer than 500 people.
- EPA invested more than \$30 million in Arsenic Rule Research to develop more cost-effective technologies for small systems.
- The majority of public water systems are very small – more than half of community water systems and nearly all non-community water systems serve fewer than 500 people.
- 72% of DWSRF loans and 38% of funds have gone to systems serving fewer than 10,000 persons

The Senate Environment and Public Works Committee held an oversight hearing on the Federal Drinking Water Programs that was a tale of two different viewpoints and in between those was an EPA suggesting a new approach to small systems challenges, an increase in but prioritized enforcement, and a need for more funding. While Chairwoman Boxer cast concerns about school children drinking unsafe water; the Ranking Member Inhofe stated that the SDWA had resulted in great success.

With the editorializing by the New York Times and CBS on the dangers of drinking water and EPA's dismal enforcement, the EPW hearings were an opportunity to put some balance to the question of just how well Federal drinking water programs were performing. And, when compared to these opinionated media reports, the EPA did bring a more balanced focus, certainly one that Congress and EPW should try to obtain.

Peter Silva, Assistant Administrator for Water, and Cynthia Giles, Assistant Administrator for Enforcement, provided joint testimony (a copy of this testimony is attached). The testimony recognized the achievements of drinking water systems and identified the need for additional EPA efforts, on a number of levels, to improve performance of certain small systems:

"The vast majority of Americans served by these systems receive water that is safe to drink. States reported last year that 92% of the people served by community water systems – the roughly 50,000 systems that serve the same population all year - received water meeting all health based drinking water standards. To make any real difference, we know we must assist the small systems, because 96% of all health based violations occur at systems serving less than 10,000 people."

Recognizing that no single effort will resolve the problems faced by some small systems, EPA proposed a new "small systems approach," consisting of three components designed to use existing SDWA "tools to reduce difficulties and provide states with active, oversight, guidance, and technical assistance." The three components are more and focused funding, strengthening the State Capacity Development Programs, and assisting with restructuring as needed.

"EPA recognizes that in some situations the most effective way to provide safe water is to help a small water system choose one of several restructuring options, ranging from informal cooperation with other systems to full ownership transfer."

We encourage you review the attached EPA testimony. You may also want to visit the Hearing for yourself at:

http://epw.senate.gov/public/index.cfm?FuseAction=Hearings.Hearing&Hearing_id=514e81cc-802a

Contact Fred or Tom

Fred Hicks – 703.626.5384
P.O. Box 2115
Springfield, VA 22152-0115
fbhicks@aol.com

Tom Ray – 254.855.0880
P.O. Box 955
Waco, TX 76703-0955
tom@hicks-ray.com



WESTCAS
Western Coalition of Arid States