

Water Laboratory Alliance Response Plan

The Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) **Water Laboratory Alliance (WLA)** provides the Water Sector with an integrated nationwide network of laboratories. In support of the WLA, EPA is sponsoring an effort to improve water laboratory preparedness at the regional, state, and local levels. A key component of this effort, the *Water Laboratory Alliance Response Plan (WLA-RP)*, is designed to assist WLA member laboratories with improving laboratory preparedness for response to natural, intentional, or unintentional water contamination incidents. EPA developed the plan in partnership with the EPA Regional Laboratories, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), state laboratories, first responders, and major drinking water utilities. This plan serves as the foundation of the Water Laboratory Alliance program.

What is the Overall Goal of the Water Laboratory Alliance Response Plan?

The goal of the WLA-RP is to assist WLA member laboratories with improving preparedness for response to actual or suspected water contamination incidents. Specifically, the WLA-RP addresses incidents that, due to their suspected cause or size, may require additional analytical support and a broader response than a typical utility, state, or federal laboratory can provide. The WLA-RP provides laboratories with a structure for a systematic, coordinated response to a water contamination incident that can be used in



What are the Benefits to the Water Sector?

- **The WLA-RP provides an immediate mechanism** to coordinate local, state, and federal laboratory efforts to meet analytical needs that may result from actual or suspected water contamination incidents. Using the WLA-RP procedures will allow laboratories to respond more quickly and efficiently to an incident. The WLA-RP also provides a tool for meeting potentially overwhelming analytical demands during the remediation phase of an event.
- **The WLA-RP includes procedures tested and refined through Full-Scale exercises.** The Full-Scale Exercises increase the level of preparedness of laboratories to respond to water contamination events by identifying improvements needed for the WLA-RP and laboratory procedures. The exercises also help strengthen relationships between laboratories which will be critical for a successful response.
- **The WLA-RP also serves as the foundation** for the development of the WLA by addressing relevant issues such as sample brokerage, analytical method selection, and secure data transfer.

conjunction with existing Incident Command System (ICS) structures and procedures. The WLA-RP also provides specific directions to meet the analytical needs of an event; including sample brokerage and tracking, communication, coordination of analyses, and analyte-specific methods. In addition, the WLA-RP is scalable, i.e. it can also be applied to responses that only involve a single laboratory.

What is the Status of WLA-RP Development and Testing?

Phase 1 – Development of the draft WLA-RP [Complete]. Regional Laboratory Response Plans (RLRPs) were developed for each of the 10 EPA Regions and Hawaii in 2008. The national WLA-RP was then developed to include similar elements and best practices from the 11 RLRPs; as well as lessons learned from functional exercises conducted in each EPA Region in 2008 to test the RLRPs.

Phase 2 – Revision of the WLA-RP based on partner comments [Complete].

EPA has solicited comments on the WLA-RP from its partners (state, water utilities, water sector organizations), including the laboratories that participated in the development and testing of the RLRPs. These comments have been evaluated and used to improve the WLA-RP.

Phase 3 – Full-Scale Exercises (FSEs) [Ongoing].

FSEs are being conducted to enhance integration of the WLA-RP with the National Incident Management System, as well as other federal network emergency response procedures, and to provide opportunities to practice multi-Regional coordination during large-scale incidents. These FSEs include participants from EPA Regions, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the FBI, state public health and state environmental laboratories, drinking water utilities, law enforcement, and federal, state, and local first responders. These multi-Regional exercises allow participants to practice procedures related to providing support to an environmental and public health incident that includes actual sample analyses, communication, coordination, and data reporting.

Full-Scale Exercise–September 2009.

EPA conducted the first multi-Regional FSE in Regions 1 and 2 (Northeastern US) in September 2009. This exercise was planned and conducted in conjunction with CDC to assess the effectiveness of response to a combined chemical and biological warfare agent attack. This exercise tested the WLA-RP and EPA Environmental Response Laboratory Network (ERLN) and CDC Laboratory Response Network (LRN) emergency response procedures through the analyses of actual environmental and clinical samples.

Phase 4 Revision of the WLA-RP based on lessons learned from the FSEs [Ongoing]. EPA will use the lessons learned from the FSEs and the progress made toward effective collaborative laboratory response to improve the WLA-RP.

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