

Right to Know Working Group

March 25-26, 1999

Executive Summary

The Right-to-Know Working Group of the National Drinking Water Advisory Council (NDWAC) held its second meeting on March 25 and 26, 1999, at the Hilton Crystal City. John Trax substituted for Jim Dunlap on March 25 only. Lynn Thorp substituted for Cyndi Roper on both days. All other members attended both days of the meeting.

I. BACKGROUND:

The NDWAC Right-to-Know Working Group held its first meeting September 24 and 25, 1998, followed by a conference call on November 4. The group's recommendations on actions EPA should take to help implement the public information and public involvement provisions of the Safe Drinking Water Act were presented to the full NDWAC at its November 1998 meeting {link to NDWAC meeting report here} The working group recommended:

- Principles to support the development of all public outreach products on drinking water
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- Principles to support the development of public materials providing further information on the Consumer Confidence Reports (CCRs)
- Specific materials which would be most useful to helping multiples audiences expect and understand the drinking water information which will be made available to the public over the next year.

II. MAJOR ISSUES RAISED AND ADDRESSED AT THE MEETING:

Materials drafted to support Consumer Confidence Reports, as recommended to EPA by NDWAC in November 1998.

The working group reviewed several web-based and print draft documents, which EPA prepared in response to recommendations from NDWAC and others. Materials included:

- general answers to basic questions consumers are likely to ask after they read their Consumer Confidence Reports
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- pointers to where to go for more detailed information in those major areas
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- an overview of the opportunities for the public to get involved in the drinking water program at the local, state, and national levels
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- quick reference pointers to available and forthcoming drinking water data.

Working group members used the following questions to review the materials:

- is the information presented clearly?
- are the products useful?
- would you use them in your own work, and how?
- are there still gaps remaining in the information?

- how do they stack up against the principles this group recommended for all products?

ACTION:

The working group liked the general form of the materials and recommended edits and additions to them. One major recommendation is that EPA develop additional information on health effects of contaminants, as well as information on CCRs targeted specifically to health care providers. EPA will take working group recommendations into account as final versions are produced.

Public Service Announcements

The Working Group's highest priority recommendation at its first meeting (fall, 1998) was that EPA should provide materials that would let the public know that Consumer Confidence Reports are coming. Public service announcements (PSAs) were identified as one major product needed soon. EPA has committed funds to developing PSAs, and asked working group members for their recommendations on message, target audiences, and distribution mechanisms.

ACTIONS:

The working group agreed that there are at least two major messages which could be developed for PSAs: Consumer Confidence Reports, and drinking water awareness generally, including the need for source water protection. The group recommended that a set of PSAs be developed and distributed by mid-summer 1999 to get out the message that CCRs are coming. A subgroup of members will work with EPA over the next couple of months to help develop the PSAs.

Distribution of Materials and Establishing Partnerships at the Local Level

Working group members discussed ways to get information to the public, including ways that they could use the information in their own communities. Members shared lessons learned from working with the public on drinking water awareness, and suggested new ways that they and others could help prepare the public to receive, understand, and act appropriately on Consumer Confidence Reports.

ACTION:

EPA will share suggestions among working group members and others. Working group members will work within their communities to "get the word out."

Evaluation

Working group members discussed ways to evaluate materials created to help various audiences understand and use drinking water information found in their CCRs and other places. Group members suggested various methods of evaluation, including: formal evaluation methods such as focus groups or beta testing; informal feedback at conferences; and making comment boxes available on the home page.

ACTIONS:

Several working group members volunteered to use their own organizations or citizen advisory groups as evaluation mechanisms over the next couple of months. EPA will explore evaluation options to use with information available on the internet, as well as for print products.

Public Notification Rule

EPA presented information on the statutory requirements for public notification in the case of immediate threat to health from drinking water contamination, and asked the working group for advice on including public notification information in materials prepared to support CCRs.

ACTION:

The working group recommended including public notification language in several areas of draft materials.

Linkages with NDWAC Working Group on Health Care Provider Outreach and Education

ACTION:

Members identified a subgroup, who will serve as representatives from the Right-to-Know Working Group to the Health Care Provider Working Group. The group also recommended that NDWAC:

- advise EPA that all materials prepared to support CCRs pursuant to the recommendations of the Right-to-Know Working Group be provided to health care providers specifically, in addition to the general public
- advise EPA to ask the Health Care Provider Working Group for advice on the best ways to distribute this information to health care providers

Safe Drinking Water Act 25th Anniversary Futures Forum

EPA shared with working group members a list of the major questions for discussion that will feed into a Safe Drinking Water Act 25th Anniversary Futures Forum on December 16, 1999, along with a current calendar of conferences and meetings at which these questions will be discussed.

ACTION:

Working group members suggested additional conferences and meetings which could be used to contribute to the SDWA 25 Futures discussion. Several working group members have already used their own association or other meetings to host SDWA 25 futures discussions.

III. NEXT STEPS:

Working group recommendations will be presented to NDWAC at its meeting during the first week of May.

The next working group meeting will be held in fall, 1999.

IV. PUBLIC COMMENT

There were no public comments offered on either day of the meeting.