

# Wisconsin's Capacity Development Strategy



In July 2000, the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) submitted a Capacity Development Strategy to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to meet the requirements of the 1996 amendments to the Safe Drinking Water Act (SDWA). The strategy affects all existing public water systems in the state.

Capacity development is a program that aims to help public water systems strengthen their ability to consistently supply safe drinking water to their customers. The program focuses on assisting system owners and operators, particularly small water systems, with improving their technical abilities, managerial skills, and financial resources to comply with the SDWA requirements.

One of the goals of the Capacity Development Program is to help water systems improve operations and, most importantly, avoid contamination. The Capacity Development Program was authorized by the 1996 amendments to the SDWA, which established a strong new emphasis on preventing contamination problems. Because it focuses on prevention, capacity development is a more proactive and positive program, rather than having an after-the-fact, "regulate and enforce" focus.

The DNR has been implementing a program since October 1,

1999 to ensure that new public water systems demonstrate capacity. The existing system strategy will be a guide for the state to assist existing public water systems in acquiring and maintaining technical, managerial, and financial capacity. This fact sheet provides an overview of Wisconsin's Capacity Development Strategy.

## Evaluating Capacity of Existing Public Water Systems

To ensure that the technical, managerial, and financial capacity of public water systems is evaluated on a regular basis, the DNR is modifying its facility contact, inspection, and evaluation processes. The goal is to create a standardized capacity evaluation format for each type of public water system. The information collected during the capacity evaluation will be used to prioritize which public water systems have capacity deficiencies and may be in need of further assistance.

In Wisconsin, sanitary surveys and inspections are routinely performed at existing public water systems. Sanitary surveys are in-depth investigations of systems to evaluate the adequacy of the water source, facilities, equipment, and operation and maintenance of the water systems. The objective of the



survey is to identify any item that may adversely affect the availability or quality of water in a public water system. Annual inspections are performed only at municipal systems that are not scheduled to receive a sanitary survey for that year. The inspections include an on-site review of system facilities and a review of sampling and reporting records.

The DNR will use a variety of criteria to evaluate capacity. The following types of information may be reviewed and/or collected during the evaluation:

- General facility information
- Owner name & address
- Operator name & address
- Managerial programs
- Operating information
- Well(s)
- Source water
- Well pump(s)
- Pump station
- Storage
- Distribution system
- Treatment
- Water quality & sampling
- Contracted professionals (lawyers, accountants, etc.)
- Public relations/citizen participation
- Long-range planning & budgeting practices
- Financial status (monitoring, operation & maintenance costs)
- Accounting practices
- Recordkeeping practices

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## Prioritizing Systems with Technical, Managerial, and Financial Capacity Deficiencies

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DNR's Capacity Development Coordinator, with the help of other SDWA staff, will prioritize systems with capacity deficiencies on an annual basis. The prioritization process will likely occur in the fall of each year to coincide with other DNR drinking water activities. Prioritization will focus on systems that are out of compliance with the SDWA requirements or that are on the verge of being out of compliance.



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## Capacity Development Toolbox

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Public water systems in Wisconsin face a variety of challenges in their quest to provide safe drinking water at an affordable cost. However, there are many SDWA programs and activities that can be used to address the obstacles encountered by existing public systems. These "tools" help systems acquire and/or enhance their technical, managerial, and financial capacity.

In Wisconsin, a number of capacity building activities and programs already exist. These tools will continue to be used to help

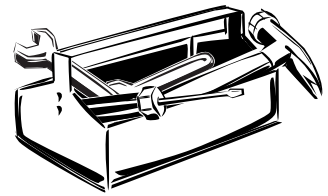
public water systems comply with the SDWA requirements. Some capacity development tools can be targeted towards specific systems based on the prioritization and capacity evaluation results. For instance, a system that does not have financial capacity may be offered additional, specific guidance on budgeting and long-term planning. Other tools will be used broadly to address systems statewide, regardless of their capacity development status. One example is the annual mailing of monitoring letters and schedules to help systems plan and budget for upcoming monitoring.

Some of Wisconsin's existing capacity development tools include:

- Sanitary surveys (all public systems) & annual inspections (municipal systems): Sanitary surveys and inspections provide a comprehensive and accurate record of the components of water systems. Inspectors assess the operating conditions and adequacy of the water system, and determine if past recommendations have been implemented effectively.
- DNR plan review: Final plans and specifications must be reviewed and approved by the DNR prior to construction for all municipal and OTM systems and for nontransient noncommunity systems with a pumping capacity greater than 70 gallons per minute.
- One-on-one technical assistance from state and local government staff: Staff from municipal, county, and state government offer assistance to systems on a day-to-day basis to ensure that system owners

and operators understand the regulations.

- Technical assistance contractors: The DNR awarded a contract to the Wisconsin Rural Water Association (WRWA) to provide technical assistance to Other-Than-Municipal (OTM) and Nontransient Noncommunity (NTNC) systems. The WRWA provides one-on-one assistance to water system operators, covering a variety of SDWA topics and issues.
- Operator certification: Based on the requirements in the 1996 SDWA amendments, all community and NTNC systems must have certified operators. DNR expanded its operator certification program to include the certification of OTM and NTNC systems. People interested in becoming certified must submit an application and successfully pass an examination. Certification needs to be renewed every 3 years.
- Safe Drinking Water Loan Program: Wisconsin is using part of its federal Drinking Water State Revolving Fund allotment to provide low-interest loans to eligible municipal water systems. These loans, provided by the state's Safe Drinking Water Loan Program, may be used for infrastructure improvements.
- Small municipal systems educational sessions: The DNR is working with the University of Wisconsin (UW) to organize and conduct educational sessions for small municipal systems. The sessions, held statewide by the UW, cover a variety of drinking water topics.





Wisconsin is also pursuing some new activities to help public water systems build technical, managerial, and financial capacity:

- **Drinking Water System Coalitions:** The DNR is hiring a contractor to establish “coalitions” of municipal and OTM water system owners and operators throughout the state. The intent of the coalitions is to create forums where owners/operators may: discuss issues in an informal setting, network with other communities to share ideas and possibly equipment, and receive information on the new regulations from the EPA and review their implications.
- **Additional training & workshops:** The DNR would like to expand its public water system owner/operator training and workshop efforts to include a wider variety of capacity development topics. Training programs may be developed in the following areas: operation and maintenance, financial planning, as well as training for municipal officials and governing boards.
- **Additional guidance:** The DNR is creating additional guidance and informational materials to help owners, operators, and utility boards effectively manage public water systems.

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## Measuring Success & Reporting

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On a regular basis, Wisconsin must evaluate the success of its capacity development efforts. The DNR will track the activity in a number of drinking water programs to establish a baseline for measuring improvements in the capacity of Wisconsin’s public water systems. The baseline information will provide the groundwork for producing and submitting future capacity development progress reports to the Governor of Wisconsin and the EPA.

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## Where can I learn more?

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- To request more capacity development information or a copy of the strategy, please write to:  
Capacity Development  
Coordinator  
Wisconsin DNR, DG/2  
Box 7921  
Madison, WI 53707-7921
- Or, contact the Capacity Development Coordinator by calling (608) 264-9246 or via e-mail at [billic@dnr.state.wi.us](mailto:billic@dnr.state.wi.us).
- Also, check out DNR’s drinking water web site:  
[www.dnr.state.wi.us/org/water/dwg/](http://www.dnr.state.wi.us/org/water/dwg/).



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