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The Authoritative Resource on Safe Water <sup>SM</sup>

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### **Senate Agriculture Committee Passes Farm Bill with Regional Water Program**

The Senate Agriculture Committee on Thursday approved language for a new omnibus Farm Bill that significantly expands funding for conservation activities, including those that help protect sources of drinking water. Overall, the bill, formally titled the Food and Energy Security Act, would almost double conservation spending from the current level of just under \$4 billion annually. The bill also contains a new Regional Water Enhancement Project (RWEPP) program as part of the suite of farm conservation programs. Under RWEPP, water utilities can receive conservation funds for the purpose of coordinating the water-beneficial conservation activities of a number of growers in their watershed. AWWA and other water groups have been actively supporting both a boost in overall conservation spending and development of the RWEPP program. Current practice at USDA is to look at individual farmer applications for conservation funding, not at regional projects involving numbers of farmers.

More good news is that the Partnerships program is eligible to receive up to 5 percent of all conservation funds, except for those earmarked to the Conservation Reserve and Wetlands Reserve programs. The bad news is that the Senate bill only allows – it does not require - the Department of Agriculture to spend funds to support regional projects. AWWA, other water associations, and environmental groups have been pressing Congress to make this program mandatory. The House farm bill approved this summer (H.R. 2419) does make this spending mandatory by USDA, up to \$60 million annually.

Senate Agriculture Committee Tom Harkin of Iowa plans to have Senate bill on the floor of the Senate next week. The committee approved legislative language this week; a bill number has not been assigned yet.

### **Action on Possible Revisions to Total Coliform Rule Heats Up**

The first three meetings of the Total Coliform Rule / Distribution System Rule Federal Advisory Committee - held in July, September, and October – focused on identifying issues and developing a baseline understanding concerning the TCR and distribution system issues. The Committee will soon shift into higher gear, with meetings in December and January that focus on developing options for potential revisions to the existing federal rule for total coliforms. By February or so, the group expects to move into evaluation of options and consensus building. EPA hopes to have a signed agreement in July 2008.

AWWA's own TCR Technical Advisory Workgroup met in Washington yesterday and continues today. This group is categorizing the elements of the TCR, and prioritizing elements for potential revision.

## **Water Security Council to Work on Tracking Sector Progress in Security**

The Water Sector Coordinating Council (WSCC) will meet October 29-30 in Chantilly, Va., to discuss several action items associated with the implementation of the national Water Sector Specific Plan (SSP) [<http://www.dhs.gov/xlibrary/assets/nipp-ssp-water.pdf>]. This includes a detailed discussion of a draft report on security metrics developed by a joint working group of the WSCC and the Government Coordinating Council (GCC, which represents the government agencies involved in water security). These metrics need to be aligned with the goals and objectives of the SPP to convey and track the water sector's progress in becoming more secure and resilient.

Some of the proposed metrics will be focused on utility actions, while others are to focus on the work of associations, states, and federal agencies that provide tools for the sector. The WSCC plans to survey utilities in mid-2008 on a voluntary basis, in order to develop baseline metrics. No utility-level data or attribution information will be kept. All information will be aggregated to provide a sector-level report that will be tracked annually.

In addition to metrics, the WSCC will discuss what tasks remain to coordinate completion of the Risk Analysis and Management for Critical Asset Protection (RAMCAP), including the development of RAMCAP-consistent versions of several vulnerability assessment tools used in the water sector (RAM-W, VSAT and SEMS). The National Infrastructure Protection Plan (NIPP) establishes baseline criteria for risk assessment methodologies. The purpose of the RAMCAP process is to provide a consistent measurement system and produce results that are comparable at the sector and cross-sector levels. Utilities will not be required to use RAMCAP, but it will be offered as a voluntary method to allow for the reporting of a single security "score." This in turn will help prioritize federal resource allocations.

## **Utilities Encouraged to Participate in Survey on Chemical Security Practices**

AWWA, the Association of Metropolitan Water Agencies, Water Environment Federation, National Association of Clean Water Agencies, National Association of Water Companies, and National Rural Water Association are collaborating in an effort to collect information regarding chemical security practices being taken by the water sector.

This data collection effort – formally launched on October 12 – was spurred by inquiries and concerns from Congress the Department of Homeland Security, and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. These concerns arose from terrorist activities in Iraq and certain events in the U.S. earlier this year. All utilities are encouraged to participate in the survey so that all stakeholders can better understand current state-of-the-sector practices associated with securing chemicals, including chlorine gas. The survey can be found at:

[http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=GQqZmEbkHX8AaPG\\_2fXJI\\_2fcA\\_3d\\_3d](http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=GQqZmEbkHX8AaPG_2fXJI_2fcA_3d_3d).

## **Bill Introduced to Boost Research & Development of Water Conservation**

U.S. Rep. Jim Matheson of Utah has introduced a bill – the Water Use Efficiency and Conservation Research Act (H.R. 3957) – that would create a new research and development program at the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to promote the efficiency of water use and conservation. No specific level of funding is authorized. The House Subcommittee on Science and Technology has scheduled a hearing on water efficiency and conservation for October 30.

As always, please get in touch with your AWWA Washington Office if you have questions or comments.