

Introduction

On July 14, 1999, the COG Board of Directors established a “Task Force on Water Supply Issues” to review the region’s water supply systems, drought emergency plans, as well as to review long-term water supply plans and needs. The Task Force was established during one of the 3 most severe periods of drought of the 20th century. The response to this situation in the region varied substantially, creating some confusion and concern by the COG Board that the region was not speaking with a common voice. As a result, after taking some immediate actions to address conditions during the summer of 1999, the Board directed the Task Force to provide special emphasis on communication and coordination among local and state governments, water supply utilities, the media and general public in the event of another serious drought in the future.

The Task Force spent the next four months responding to the Board’s charge, including an all day workshop focused on the full range of regional water supply issues.¹ On November 10, 1999, the Task Force issued a report containing its findings and recommendations.² One of the central recommendations was the need to develop a common set of triggers and actions to be used by local governments and water utilities to insure a coordinated response to another serious drought event. This document, the Metropolitan Washington Water Supply and Drought Awareness and Response Plan represents a major step toward achieving the Board’s goal.

The Plan consists of two interrelated components: (1) a year-round program emphasizing wise water use; (2) a water supply and drought awareness and response plan. The year-round wise water use program applies to the entire region and is currently under development; what is presented herein is the basic framework and initial work on key messages. The “Water Supply and Drought Awareness and Response Plan” contains four stages and is currently designed primarily for those customers who use the Potomac River for water supply. In the coming months, the Task Force will continue to focus its efforts on the expansion of this plan to incorporate other water supply systems (i.e., small public utilities, groundwater, and agriculture), and development of a year round wise water use campaign. The Task Force will also continue to address the relationships between water supply and the environment.

The COG Board Task Force on Water Supply Issues is chaired by Loudoun County Chairman-at-Large Scott K. York. Its members were drawn from COG’s local governments, and it received substantial support from area water utilities, state agencies, the Interstate Commission on the Potomac River Basin, and public information officers. Lead staff support to the Task Force was provided by Stuart A. Freudberg, COG’s Director of Environmental Programs, and James W. Shell, Jr., Principal Water Resources Planner. A complete list of Task Force members and affiliated organizations, along with the entire list of COG staff assisting in this effort is shown under Tab 2.

Questions or comments about this document should be directed to Stuart A. Freudberg at (202) 962-3340 or sfreudberg@mwkog.org, or Jim Shell at (202) 962-3342, or jshell@mwkog.org.

Notes:

1 – Proceedings of the Task Force full-day workshop are available from the COG Information Center, 202/962-3256, or downloaded on-line from www.mwkog.org/dep/water/taskforce_agenda.htm

2 – A copy of the November 10, 1999 Task Force report may be obtained from Jim Shell at (202) 962-3340, or downloaded on-line from www.mwkog.org/dep/water/download/find_rec_10_29_99.pdf.