



Water Supply Resiliency in Metropolitan Washington

Could Richmond's type of water crisis happen in the DC region?

Based on the metropolitan Washington region's approach to water delivery and collaborative work to harden its energy infrastructure and conduct exercises to prepare for emergency responses, area leaders have taken steps to prevent a water crisis like the one that occurred in Richmond. In addition, the region is currently partnering on a major three-year study with the US Army Corps of Engineers to identify a new backup water supply to ensure greater resiliency.

The metropolitan Washington region has a different approach to water delivery

- For most of the DC region, water is pumped directly to treatment plants from the Potomac River without a reservoir in between, as is the case in Richmond. The three largest water utilities also operate two separate water treatment plants each, providing some redundancy if power is lost to one facility.
- Large water treatment plants in the region are connected to dual electric feeds to ensure continuous operation in case of power outages, as water treatment is critical for public health.

The region has learned from past disasters and area leaders have taken action

- Following the Derecho in 2012, the region's energy utilities took action to harden their infrastructure after widespread outages. There was also a new focus on ensuring key locations, like hospitals, were priorities for water restoration. COG helped connect these different groups to coordinate and plan together.
- In 2024, COG and regional partners conducted three emergency exercises focused on topics like coordinating during a water supply disruption as well as a winter storm leading to widespread power outages.
- The region also has mutual aid agreements, including one specifically for area water utilities, to provide support to each other in case of emergencies. The region also has the RICCS communications tool to allow 24/7 emergency notifications among area leaders and COG convenes public information officers groups to coordinate messaging.

It's still important to remind the public about personal preparedness

- For years, area officials have advised the public to have a three-day supply of water, food, and medicine in case of emergencies. These water disruptions, or threats of disruptions, are a good reminder for people to be prepared. Information about how to prepare can be found at [ready.gov](https://www.ready.gov)