By Lonnie Boller, Technical Assistant

# Being Prepared for an Emergency

KRWA's water testing and training lab.

The goal is to be prepared for an emergency. But what is the emergency? Those come in many forms such as fire, earthquake, tornado, flooding, drought, chemical spills, or a major water line break.

As we all know it is important to be prepared for an emergency. The first step is to develop an emergency water supply plan, which is a requirement of the Kansas Department of Health and Environment (KDHE). The overall purpose of the plan is to safeguard the water system and to alert the public of unsafe drinking water in the event of natural or man-made disasters. The plan will include the purpose, description of the system, disaster organization, mutual aid agreements, inventory of available equipment, vulnerability of system, water rationing ordinance or regulations, list of key personnel, communications, and an annual review. Once completed, it should be submitted to KDHE for review and approval.

The next step is to complete the vulnerability assessment of the water system. This requires segmenting the water system into major components such as water source treatment, plant, pumping, storage and distribution. System operators and managers need to consider how each segment will be affected by a potential disaster. For example, what impact could a tornado have on a storage tank and what corrective measures can be taken before, during, and after the event?

In an emergency, it is important for a utility's employees to know their role and responsibility. Each system should have a list of system employees and should include their address, home phone, and cell phone. When there's an emergency, employees need to be reached.

Once an emergency happens there will be many people to communicate with. This includes emergency responders, state and local agencies, and other water systems that may want to provide help. You may also set up an incident command post. This will help better organized emergency responders and employees.

It is also helpful to have a list of outside contractors and suppliers. Who to call, and what can they do? That's important to know before the emergency situation unfolds.

The city or rural water district should also have an emergency contact list. This would be a list of agencies that you would need to contact in the event of an emergency such as Kansas Department of Health and Environment and the Federal Emergency Management Agency – and KRWA or others.

Water systems are not static. Things and people change. Information can be added at any time to the emergency water supply plan to improve it.

I also recommend working with nearby cities and rural water districts that can be of help in an emergency. Some systems have a mutual aid agreement and also have emergency connections for water supply.

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KRWA has two portable pressure tanks. Each has a capacity of 3,500 gallons. The tanks have been used frequently in water systems during storage tank maintenance.

KRWA also has a database of many contractors, suppliers and all the water systems in Kansas. This can be helpful if parts are needed in an emergency. I can assure you that KRWA staff will be there to help in the event of a disaster or emergency.

*Lonnie Boller is a Technical Assistant at KRWA. He has been employed by KRWA since 2001. Lonnie is a Class II certified operator; he previously was Water Plant Supervisor for the City of Horton. He has also attended and completed training at the University of Kansas Law Enforcement Training Center.*

Over my 19 years of working for Kansas Rural Water Association, I have responded to several disasters that have come in many different forms such as tornadoes, flooding, drought, and ice storms. During these disasters or emergencies, the operators and staff of the system are sometimes overwhelmed. There is a lot to do such as organizing volunteers, contractors, law enforcement, and many state and local government officials.

The more preparation that is done in advance, the easier and more smoothly you will get through an emergency or disaster that happens in your area.

Kansas Rural Water Association also has equipment to help during a disaster such as pressure tanks, portable laboratory, portable chlorine analyzers, and many other tools if needed.

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