



At a Glance

Catalyst for Improving the Environment

Why We Did This Review

We conducted this review to determine the progress made by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and its partners to protect drinking water from contamination from source to consumer.

Background

The Safe Drinking Water Act (SDWA) Amendments of 1996 contain provisions to help States and water systems improve public health protection. The provisions include:

- Assessing water sources.
- Certifying system operators.
- Improving the technical, managerial, and financial capacity of water systems.
- Providing funding for infrastructure improvements.
- Providing funding to States.
- Keeping the public informed.

For further information, please contact our Office of Congressional and Public Liaison at (202) 566-2391.

To view the full report, click on the following link:
www.epa.gov/oig/reports/2005/20050822-2005-P-00021.pdf

To view a supplemental report with additional details, click on:
www.epa.gov/oig/reports/2005/20050822-2005-P-00021.A.pdf

Progress Report on Drinking Water Protection Efforts

What We Found

EPA and the States in this sample are making progress at helping water systems better reach Congress' goal of protecting drinking water from its source to the consumer. EPA worked to develop guidance and provide other assistance for States, and oversee State programs. The flexibility of the 1996 SDWA Amendments enabled States to better tailor drinking water protection approaches to meet their needs. Because of the SDWA Amendments of 1996: 86 percent of source waters are assessed and protection efforts are beginning; more water systems have trained and certified operators; water systems are receiving technical, managerial, and financial capacity assistance; water systems have access to low-interest loans; and consumers are receiving more information about their drinking water quality.

Although States have more flexibility to tailor programs to meet their needs, challenges remain. States reported budgets as being sufficient for current activities, though implementing new drinking water regulations and the effects of staff retirements are concerns. States face specific challenges in implementing certain SDWA provisions, but there are opportunities to help reduce those obstacles to achieving safe drinking water.

EPA's measures are generally related to outputs that measure specific program activities performed. The Agency links these activities to the long-term goal of "Clean and Safe Water." There are difficulties in measuring progress toward its long-term goal, however, because activity measures do not yet exist for all SDWA provisions. EPA has limited State reporting requirements, and the integration of various programs makes it harder to measure the impact of each program. Measuring the long-term outcomes of drinking water programs is important in determining whether programs produced intended results and public health is protected.

What We Recommend

Due, in part, to the breadth of this study, we are only making recommendations in two areas. We recommend that EPA identify methods to improve the Consumer Confidence Report, because we found this to be pertinent to all eight States covered by our review. We also recommend that EPA continue to develop measures for individual SDWA provisions. We encourage the Assistant Administrator for Water to support the drinking water program's efforts to develop indicators based on a logic model for the Public Water System Supervision Program.