



Water PLUS / Agua y MÁS

Improving Access to Safe Drinking Water and Sanitation in Latin America and the Caribbean



Technical site visit to water treatment facility, Spanish Town, Jamaica, 2006 for PAHO/CDC/EPA Water Safety Plan Project.

Access to safe drinking water is one of the most important determinants of public health. Yet 60 million people in Latin America and the Caribbean lack access to safe water sources. More than twice that many people—136 million—lack access to improved sanitation facilities. The impact is deadly: in Latin America, two children per thousand die of diarrheal disease before their 5th birthday.

Increased access to safe water and sanitation, along with improved hygiene practices, could reduce the burden of disease in the region. Achieving this goal calls for more than infrastructure alone. Ideally, input is needed not only from

the water sector, but from the public health sector as well. At the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), we approach water and sanitation from an *environmental public health* perspective to ensure that water and sanitation investments produce the maximum gain in health. *This approach is called Water PLUS / Agua y MÁS.*

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Factors affecting water safety vary by setting and water source. CDC works with a range of communities in Latin America and the Caribbean, from small settlements reliant on individual wells or small bodies of surface water to urban communities with municipal water treatment facilities. CDC provides technical advice and oversight, training, and funding. CDC also participates in the development, implementation, and assessment of water supply and sanitation programs.

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Water Safety Plans: CDC has joined with the Pan American Health Organization and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to promote and implement the World Health Organization's *Water Safety Plan* methodology in collaboration with local partners. A Water Safety Plan is a comprehensive approach to assuring drinking water safety. It relies on environment and health sector collaboration to identify, assess, monitor, and manage risks inherent in a water delivery system from "catchment to consumer." The key components include a supply system assessment, effective operational monitoring, and management. Water Safety Plans use a *systematic preventive approach* to problem-solving by identifying all points in the drinking water system where contamination could compromise the water reaching consumers.

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Going beyond the water supply system: For optimum health, people need access to water that remains clean until they are ready to use it. This is a challenge in areas where people lack round-the-clock water service and taps in their homes. Water can be kept clean by avoiding contamination at the source, during transport to the home, and during storage and handling within the home; and in some settings, by disinfecting water within the home. Ensuring safety at all these points requires *attention to sanitation facilities and hygiene practices* in addition to water sources. Multifaceted interventions comprising water supply, sanitation, and hygiene elements have the potential to improve health outcomes beyond what could be achieved by single-component programs, provided that each element receives adequate emphasis. CDC's programs include multiple facets where appropriate and ensure that sufficient attention is given to each part of the project. In this way, it is hoped that synergistic improvements in health will occur.

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Rigorous evaluation of results: CDC's approach to water supply and sanitation interventions includes *outcome evaluation* to determine whether the intervention has succeeded in improving health – and why or why not. Evaluation provides crucial information that allows fine-tuning of intervention designs and achievement of maximum benefits.



Visit to water treatment plant during regional Water Safety Plan workshop, Buenos Aires, Argentina, 2005. Workshop sponsored by PAHO/CDC/EPA partnership.

Current Activities:

- A PAHO/CDC/EPA Water Safety Plan Demonstration Project in Spanish Town, Jamaica began in January 2006.
- A CDC and Coca-Cola funded Water Safety Plan Pilot Project in Tarija, Bolivia, began in August 2006.
- A U.S. State Department-sponsored National Program of Action / Water Safety Plan in Guyana will begin in October 2006, in conjunction with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.
- Trinidad and El Alto, Bolivia, will be pilot sites for a World Bank-funded sanitation intervention starting September 2006, in partnership with Emory University and Fundación Sumaj Huasi.
- A multi-faceted water, sanitation, and hygiene intervention sponsored by the Inter-American Development Bank and will commence in September 2006 in Bermajo, Bolivia.

Water PLUS / Agua y MÁS Partners in Latin America and the Caribbean:

Andean Health Organization
 Caribbean Environmental Health Institute
 Emory University

Fundación Sumaj Huasi - Bolivia
 FunSalud Foundation - Bolivia
 National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
 Pan American Health Organization
 The Coca-Cola Company
 U.S. Department of State
 U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

