



# At a Glance

*Catalyst for Improving the Environment*

## Why We Did This Review

We conducted this review to examine the challenges faced by small drinking water systems in providing water that is safe to drink and the adequacy of U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and State initiatives for addressing those challenges.

## Background

EPA classifies public water systems according to the number of people they serve, the source of the water, and whether they serve the same customers year-round or on an occasional basis. There are approximately 54,000 community water systems of which 85 percent are small (501 to 3,300 people) or very small (25 to 500 people), serving 10 percent of this Nation's population.

For further information, 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/2006/20060530-2006-P-00026.pdf](http://www.epa.gov/oig/reports/2006/20060530-2006-P-00026.pdf)

## ***Much Effort and Resources Needed to Help Small Drinking Water Systems Overcome Challenges***

### **What We Found**

The critical issues facing small drinking systems have not changed in recent years. Our preliminary research suggests that they have faced and still face a multitude of challenges that fall into two basic categories: financial/management matters and regulatory/compliance issues.

Government and nongovernment organizations have attempted many different initiatives and approaches to assist small drinking water systems in overcoming their challenges. We noted several State and third party initiatives that could be used for best practices. While it is difficult to measure the effectiveness of individual EPA and State activities to assist small drinking water systems, our preliminary research provided indicators of success as well as limitations of these approaches.

Limited data exist on the health impacts related to small drinking water systems. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention maintains the data system on drinking water cases, but states that the information is vastly underreported. That is not to say that the potential for health impacts is not something to be taken seriously. Some data show health outbreaks related to small drinking water systems.

### **What We Recommend**

We recommend that EPA work with States to identify successful approaches for working with small systems to obtain financing. We also recommend the Agency work closer with States to identify and compile small system best practices and establish a method for disseminating the information, to maximize limited resources to assist small systems. Our recommendations in this report, while necessary, will not in themselves solve small system problems in their entirety.