HELPING LOCAL GOVERNMENTS RESPOND TO DRINKING WATER INCIDENTS

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BACKGROUND
Drinking water incidents such as floods, infrastructure failures, or contaminations may create real or perceived threats to the safety of drinking water across North Carolina. The purpose of the Drinking Water Working Group (DWWG) is to compile a toolkit of resources to assist local governments when they must respond to such incidents.

Other toolkits exist, but none that are tailored to local governments in North Carolina. The value of the DWWG toolkit is that it is succinct, practical and specific to North Carolina’s regulatory framework.

The DWWG is composed of subject matter experts, local government officials, and public health professionals from all around the state. Participants include staff members of the NC Department of Environmental Quality, the NC Division of Public Health, UNC’s Gillings School of Global Public Health, and local government officials from numerous towns and counties in North Carolina.

CASE STUDIES

The DWWG evaluated a number of drinking water incidents from recent years, such as:

- The GenX discharge into the Cape Fear River;
- A boil water advisory issued in Onslow County following flooding from Hurricane Florence; and
- A water main break in Swannanoa—illustrating the risks of old and failing infrastructure.

While any one local government may not be able to predict exactly what, when, or how something will happen to their resident’s drinking water, all of North Carolina’s local governments can and should anticipate that they will encounter a drinking water incident at some point.
When that happens, it raises a number of questions:

- What will they do?
- What will they need to know?
- Who will they need to work with to produce an effective response?
- How will they communicate about the incident with their residents?
- What will they want to have in place to support them in all these efforts?

DEVELOPMENT OF TOOLKIT

The final product of the DWWG was the development of local government toolkit to help plan, prepare and respond to drinking water incidents. Included among the toolkit are:

- Materials for a local pre-incident planning meeting;
- Worksheets for assembling local information about persons to contact in an incident;
- Sample local documents, such as mutual aid agreements;
- Links to communication tools, such as drinking water advisories; and
- North Carolina specific resources, such as directories of relevant agencies.

The full Drinking Water Incident Response Toolkit can be found at:  
https://www.sog.unc.edu/resources/microsites/drinking-water-incident-response-toolkit