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# GOOD STORY

## The California Bay Area's Water Utility Threat Condition Response Plan

### SUMMARY

The Bay Area Security Information Collaborative (BASIC), a water utility security working group, released its Water Utility Threat Condition Response Plan (WUTCRP) in the summer of 2002. The Plan specifies appropriate facility security measures for each color-coded threat level of the Homeland Security Advisory System (HSAS).

### BACKGROUND

BASIC is a group of eight Bay Area water utilities that began meeting regularly after September 11<sup>th</sup> to address their shared security challenges. One of the issues confronting BASIC was how to respond to changes in the HSAS. The federal government had designated the nation's drinking water systems as critical infrastructure, but had not recommended specific response measures for water utilities.

Determining the appropriate level of response for each threat condition proved to be a very difficult task. Moreover, media reports emphasized the differences between each utility's threat response plan. This heightened public concern by highlighting perceived vulnerabilities in the security of the water distribution system. BASIC decided to address these problems by developing shared guidelines for responding to threat condition warnings. These shared guidelines became the Water Utility Threat Condition Response Plan (WUTCRP).

### GOALS

The WUTCRP provides Bay Area water utilities with a recommended response level for each threat level on the Homeland Security Advisory System. This insures that utilities do not overreact to minor threats or under-react to major ones. Further, the Plan established consistent security levels among the large Bay Area water utilities and enabled the utilities spend their limited preparedness resources efficiently.

### DESCRIPTION

#### *Collaborative Development*

Several BASIC members developed a first draft of the WUTCRP. A completed draft was reviewed in a series of confidential, closed-door BASIC meetings. After several rounds of discussion and revisions, BASIC approved and subsequently published the WUTCRP. While intended for use by BASIC members, it soon became clear that the WUTCRP could provide useful guidance to the water industry as a whole. The California Department of Health Services and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) have both posted the WUTCRP on their websites as a model for other utilities.

### **Flexible Guidelines**

The WUTCPRP recommends security measures for each color-coded level on the Homeland Security Advisory System. These guidelines can be adapted to fit a utility’s needs and capabilities. Each participating utility should determine which of its facilities are “mission critical,” which are secondary priorities, and plan accordingly. “Each individual water utility is unique and can only initiate what it is capable of applying, and staff must make judgments on what to implement based on available threat information from the federal government and other reliable sources,” explains Steve Dennis, Emergency Services Supervisor for the Alameda County Water District and one of the primary authors of the WUTCPRP.

### **Concrete Recommendations**

The WUTCPRP suggests specific steps that can be taken to maintain the appropriate level of security for each colored threat level of the Homeland Security Advisory System. The WUTCPRP’s recommendations also cover visitor policies, mail handling procedures, contact with local law enforcement, and the appropriate level of Incident Command System activation. (To download a complete copy of the plan, go to ([LLIS.gov](http://LLIS.gov) ID# [9050](#))

Condition	Consequence (Real or Threatened)	Protective Measures	SEMS / ICS Activation(s)
<b>LOW (GREEN)</b>	Low risk of terrorist attack.	Conduct on going facility assessments; develop, test, and implement emergency plans.	ICS activated as needed in the field.
<b>GUARDED (BLUE)</b>	General risk of terrorist attack.	Activate employee and public information plan as needed; exercise communications channels with response teams and local agencies; review and exercise emergency plans.	ICS activated as needed in the field.
<b>ELEVATED (YELLOW)</b>	Significant risk of terrorist attack; water utilities are a potential target.	Increase surveillance of critical facilities; coordinate response plans with allied utilities and response agencies; and implement emergency plans, as appropriate.	Activate SEMS/ICS teams as needed; EOC partially activated as needed.
<b>HIGH (ORANGE)</b>	High risk of terrorist attack; bay area utilities are potential targets.	Limit facility access to essential staff only. Coordinate security efforts with armed forces or local law enforcement.	Activate Emergency Operations Center (EOC) and needed ICS teams; EOC Action Plan required.
<b>SEVERE (RED)</b>	Severe risk of terrorist attack; a specific utility has been identified.	Decision to close specific facilities. Redirect staff resources to critical operations only.	All Field Centers and EOC activated. Action Plan coordinated with counties.

**Figure 1: Excerpt from the Water Utility Threat Condition Response Plan**

### **Building on Success**

BASIC’s work has been recognized nationally as an important contribution to water security. Other California communities, such as Oxnard Plains, have adopted the BASIC model for regional information sharing collaboratives. BASIC’s work has been so successful that its members have developed plans for future collaborative efforts, such as developing a regional counter-terrorism response plan, establishing a regional communication system for Bay Area water utilities, and securing a central store of event response materials available to all BASIC member utilities.

#### **Bay Area Security Information Collaborative Documents**

- Water Utility Threat Condition Response Plan
- BASIC Charter

## **REQUIREMENTS**

### **Keys to Success**

The WUTCPRP would not have been developed if the water utilities of the Bay Area had not decided to share strategies for responding to security concerns. Several factors contributed to the success of their information sharing group:

- Regular meetings that are both face-to-face and confidential,
- Participation of state and federal agencies, such as the EPA, the California Department of Health Services, and the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and
- A charter that formalizes the group's relationship.

### **Resources**

The only resource required for the development of the WUTCPRP was the time and expertise of leaders from participating utilities.

### **Links**

Water Utility Threat Condition Response Plan:

*LLIS.gov* ID# [9050](#)

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