



# WATER ENVIRONMENT ASSOCIATION OF TEXAS

*Preserving & Enhancing the Water Environment of Texas*

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Testimony to Senate Intergovernmental Relations Committee  
S/C on Flooding and Evacuations  
March 4, 2009

Good afternoon, Members:

My name is Carol Batterton and I am the Executive Director of the Water Environment Association of Texas. We are a non-profit technical and educational organization whose members include scientists, engineers, utility managers, operators, and regulators. Collectively, our members are responsible for the design, operation and maintenance of wastewater collection and treatment and systems all across Texas. We are a state member association of the Water Environment Federation.

First, let me say that we sympathize with the residents of coastal areas for the outages of water and sewer service that many experienced after Hurricane Ike. We also recognize the heroic efforts of the electric service providers as they tried to restore service to water and sewer utilities under some very difficult circumstances. And, we also sympathize with elected officials who had to answer to concerned citizens about the lack of these services. We appreciate and support the need to take lessons learned from Hurricane Ike and use these lessons to improve our states' emergency preparedness response.

SB 361 requires water and wastewater utilities to ensure operation of the system during an extended power outage and to demonstrate this capability with an emergency preparedness plan. We support the requirement for emergency preparedness plans, and we do appreciate the fact that Senate Bill 361 allows for participation in a sharing agreement to satisfy this requirement. Our experience has been that, in most cases, a wastewater utility can respond to an outage by having on hand:

- Portable back up generators for lift stations, and
- A plan for sharing auxiliary generators and equipment with other utilities, such as TxWarn.

For example, one central Texas municipal utility district serving about 10,000 people has not had a central power failure of sufficient duration to cause a loss of water or wastewater service for the last 16 years. This utility does have generators at the WWTPs,

and at five major lift stations. They do not have them at 17 other lift stations, and a retrofit could cost as much as \$750,000.

Similarly, other wastewater utilities have found that lift station operation is a very critical factor during a power outage and are equipped with portable generators which are moved around to lift stations on a rotating basis during a power outage. Mobile generators have proven to be a sufficient and effective means of response to most power outages.

Many Texas wastewater utilities are participants in TxWarn, which is a voluntary program to support and promote statewide emergency preparedness, disaster response, and mutual assistance matters for public and private water and wastewater utilities.

The core of TXWARN is its emergency equipment database that matches utility resources to a member's needs during an emergency. A member can locate emergency equipment (pumps, generators, chlorinators, evacuators, etc.) and trained personnel (e.g. treatment plant operators, field crews and other staff) that they may need in an emergency.

The TXWARN program provides its member utilities with:

- A standard omnibus mutual assistance agreement and process for sharing emergency resources among members statewide.
- The resources to respond and recover more quickly from a disaster.
- A request and resource tracking system to gather data when needed including for reimbursement needs.
- A mutual assistance program consistent with other statewide mutual aid programs.
- A forum for developing and maintaining emergency contacts and relationships.
- New ideas from lessons learned in disasters.
- Training to assist utilities to be better prepared for disaster response and recovery.

Our experience has been that extended power outages such as that experienced during Hurricane Ike are infrequent and isolated, particularly in inland areas. Therefore, we have concerns about any measure that might potentially require all wastewater treatment plants to maintain onsite generators capable of operating the entire plant during an extended power outage. We have concerns for the following reasons:

- The need for widespread auxiliary power for extended periods is limited to the coastal areas.
- Depending on the size of the plant, there may have to be more than one generator which will have to be connected using expensive and involved electrical equipment.
- The cost of permanent onsite auxiliary generators could run from \$500 K to \$15 million depending on the size of the plant. Depending on the size of the plant and the number of plants, the cost per utility could be over \$100 million.

- The utility will need to stockpile large amounts of fuel (diesel) in order to be certain that the generators can be operated if needed.

In closing we would like to suggest that the need for permanent onsite auxiliary power is different for different areas of the state. An interim study evaluating the frequency of extended power outages and other factors may be the most appropriate way to identify the auxiliary power needs for water and wastewater treatment plants in different areas of the state.

In addition, we suggest that further defining the term “extended” and specifying the phase in dates by county, rather than miles inland from the coast would simplify implementation.

Thank you,

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