

HOW READY ARE WE?

By Jim Heyen, Wastewater Technician

After 911, how ready do we need to be for an emergency? Do you have a plan of action in case of an emergency? Are you ready for a natural disaster (such as Hallam)? On a smaller scale, how about a chemical spill, a break in or a disgruntled passed employee?

Plant security encompasses many aspects of plant operation and even small communities need to be aware of security issues and be ready to put an emergency plan in action if needed. Below are possible security issues and guidelines for implementing simple policy and procedures for keeping your community safer.

Significant damage to the nation's wastewater facilities/collection system:

- Loss of life
- Damage to rivers, lakes, etc.
- Contamination of drinking water supplies
- Long-term health impacts

Guard Against Unplanned Physical Intrusion

- Lock all doors at your office, pumping stations, treatment plant and vaults
- Limit access to facilities and control access to pumping stations, chemical and fuel storage, giving close scrutiny to visitors and contractors
- Post "employee only" signs in restricted areas
- Control access to storm sewers
- Secure hatches, vaults, manholes and other access points to the sanitary collection system
- Increase lighting in concerned areas
- Control access to computer control systems, if password protected, change password frequently
- Do not leave keys in equipment or vehicles at any time

Make Security a Priority to Your Employees

- Conduct background security checks on employees
- Develop a security program with written plans and train employees
- Ensure employees are aware of communication protocols to law enforcement, environmental protection and emergency response organization
- Make sure employees are aware of the importance and seriousness in breaches in security
- Consider varying patterns of operational procedures (ie: checking pump station at same time everyday)
- If an employee is dismissed make sure keys and access cards are returned
- Provide staff training if a threat is called in

Coordinate Actions for Emergency Response

- Review emergency response plans and make sure they are current
- Provide the necessary training in emergency procedures
- Develop clear protocols and Chain-of command for responding to a threat. Work with law enforcement, public health officials, consumers and the media. Practice the emergency protocols regularly
- Make sure key personnel have access to important telephone numbers and contact information at all times. Keep this list current
- Develop close relationships with local law enforcement. Make sure they know where your critical assets are located. Request they add your facility to their routine rounds
- Report criminal threats, suspicious behavior or attacks on the wastewater utility to law enforcement immediately

Investing in Security and Infrastructure Improvement

- Assess the vulnerability of the collection system, pump stations, wastewater treatment facility, chemical and fuel storage, outfall piping and other key infrastructure
- Assess the vulnerability of the stormwater collection system. Determine if the infrastructure runs beneath a government building, bank, industrial facility and major communication
- Secure the most cost effective improvement, such as perimeter fences, security lighting and tamper-proof manhole covers
- Use local citizen watch organization

Hopefully, this will aid you in your wastewater facility and system. National Rural Water is currently in the process of developing a program identifying wastewater security issues (similar to the water CD). Until this becomes available, as always, if you have any questions please give me a call.

Sources of this article:

EPA websites, National League of Cities website, Water Environment Federation website and K.T. Newman, Mississippi Rural Water Association