

# Water Laboratory Alliance

## Purpose

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) launched the Water Laboratory Alliance (WLA) in 2009. Since then, the WLA has grown to include an extensive nationwide network of laboratories. The WLA is comprised of laboratories with the expertise to analyze water samples for chemical, biological or radiochemical contaminants. These laboratories have the capability and capacity to analyze samples in response to natural, intentional or unintentional contamination incidents. The WLA is an integral part of EPA's Environmental Response Laboratory Network (ERLN) and focuses solely on water.



## Key WLA Resources & Projects

### Water Laboratory Alliance Response Plan (WLA-RP)

The WLA-RP establishes a comprehensive, national response approach to water contamination incidents requiring analytical services. The WLA-RP includes considerations for preparedness, response, remediation and recovery. Specifically, the WLA-RP addresses incidents that, due to their suspected cause or size, may require additional analytical support than a single laboratory can provide. The WLA-RP provides laboratories and utilities with best practices for a systematic, coordinated response to a water contamination incident. The best practices contained in the WLA-RP can be used in conjunction with existing Incident Command System (ICS) structures. In addition, key principles of the WLA-RP can be applied to responses that only involve a single laboratory. The WLA-RP can be accessed at <http://www2.epa.gov/waterlabnetwork/water-laboratory-alliance-response-plan>.

### Analytical Preparedness Full-Scale Exercises (AP-FSEs)

EPA's WLA Team conducts emergency response AP-FSEs on an ongoing basis to enhance laboratory, utility and response partner preparedness. Since 2009, EPA has coordinated numerous multi-regional AP-FSEs, as well as smaller-scale utility-led AP-FSEs. These exercises enable participants to practice a coordinated analytical response to a major environmental and public health incident.

## Benefits

Membership in the WLA affords a number of opportunities for laboratories to highlight their capabilities among peers and stakeholders. Additionally, WLA Members have priority access to free preparedness opportunities including:

- Participation in emergency response exercises requiring analytical support.
- WLA Training Center courses.
- Water security-related tools and resources.

These opportunities enable WLA Members to improve preparedness in a number of ways, such as:

- Enhancing incident response.
- Increasing the ability to respond to customer needs.
- Improving communications with laboratories and other response stakeholders to help address emerging analytical, laboratory security or laboratory operation challenges.
- Providing access to validated methods for unregulated contaminants of interest to the Water Sector.

More information is available at <http://www2.epa.gov/emergency-response/environmental-response-laboratory-network-membership-and-benefits>

AP-FSEs have involved a wide spectrum of participants including:

- EPA regional, state environmental and public health, municipal, utility and commercial laboratories.
- Emergency response personnel.
- Partnering federal, state and municipal agencies.

The goal of these AP-FSEs is to establish a learning environment in which participants:

- Gain experience with response best practices from the WLA-RP.
- Improve both internal and external communications.
- Interact with others to address a mock water contamination incident.

These AP-FSEs allow the coordinating organization to take on a leadership role in the mock response. The coordinating EPA region or utility:

- Identifies and coordinates analytical support.
- Works with local public health departments and reporting authorities (e.g., department of environmental quality, state drinking water authority).
- Practices the use of key EPA tools and resources.
- Establishes relationships and a framework that could be used during a real incident.

### WLA Training Center

The WLA Training Center was developed to familiarize WLA Member laboratories, utilities and Water Sector stakeholders with Water Sector best practices. Courses cover topics such as emergency response, analytical methods, sample handling and data reporting. The WLA Training Center helps ensure that these groups can take advantage of WLA benefits, and operate effectively during a response. The curriculum utilizes enhanced computer-based training, including webcasts and online modules when in-person training is not an option. Many courses are self-guided and can be accessed at any time via the Training Center website at <http://www2.epa.gov/waterlabnetwork/water-laboratory-alliance-training-center>.

### Decontamination Strategy

EPA's Water Sector Security Mission is to provide national leadership in developing and promoting security programs that enhance the Sector's ability to prevent, detect, respond to and recover from all hazards. EPA's Decontamination Strategy responds to Homeland Security Presidential

Directive (HSPD)-10 which charges EPA with developing strategies, guidelines and plans for decontamination.

EPA has worked with stakeholders to develop a suite of products to support decontamination efforts, including:

- **Containment and Disposal of Large Amounts of Contaminated Water: A Support Guide for Water Utilities**  
Contains information on containment, treatment, disposal, storage and transportation of contaminated water, including decision-making flowcharts that can be used in the field during a response; the guide addresses nearly 70 contaminants of concern to the Water Sector.
- **Decontamination Website**  
Provides easy access to decontamination documents benefiting the Water Sector.

Visit the decontamination website for the most current information on Water Sector decontamination at <http://www2.epa.gov/waterutilityresponse/learn-about-decontamination-drinking-water-and-wastewater-utilities>.

### Water Contaminant Information Tool (WCIT)

WCIT is a secure online database with comprehensive information about chemical, biological and radiochemical contaminants of concern for the Water Sector. This tool compiles drinking water- and wastewater-specific data in a one-stop, easy-to-use tool. WCIT includes more than 200 analytical methods associated with more than 800 contaminants. Register for WCIT at <http://www2.epa.gov/waterdata/water-contaminant-information-tool-registration>.

### Home Base for Environmental Laboratories

EPA awarded a cooperative agreement to the Association of Public Health Laboratories (APHL) to develop a Home Base for environmental laboratories. This Home Base is an avenue for disseminating educational programs and tools. Additionally, it is a platform for laboratories, and state and federal agencies to exchange information. As a result, environmental laboratories have a voice in crafting priorities for the WLA and are kept abreast of water security issues.

**For additional information on the WLA**, including membership, contact the WLA Helpline at 703-461-2400 or [WLA@epa.gov](mailto:WLA@epa.gov), or visit the WLA homepage at <http://www2.epa.gov/waterlabnetwork>.