



**American Water Works  
Association**

## Utility Member Benefit

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The Authoritative Resource on Safe Water®

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## Public Affairs Advisory

**TO: AWWA Leadership  
All Utilities**

**FROM: AWWA Public Affairs**

**DATE: December 10, 2009**

<b>Who:</b>	<b>Environmental Working Group / NY Times</b>
<b>What:</b>	<b>Water quality database and Sunday Times story</b>
<b>When:</b>	<b>This weekend</b>

The American Water Works Association (AWWA) expects the [Environmental Working Group](#) (EWG) to publish its updated “Tap Water Quality Database” on Saturday, announcing the report with assistance from major news media – particularly the New York Times. The Times is expected to run a story on Sunday, and large TV, radio and print outlets will likely follow it.

**Important Note:** For insight on the likely Times’ angle, listen to the [“Takeaway with Charles Duhigg”](#) podcast in the lefthand column of [this page](#).

The EWG report -- which has been noted in [previous advisories](#) by AWWA -- is likely to generate both print and TV/radio reports locally and will be widely promoted on the Web. AWWA has learned that EWG will rank water quality for the top 100 largest utilities in its report.

For this reason, **AWWA strongly advises utilities to communicate in advance with local media about this story to add balance and perspective.** Television and radio outlets that are briefed by their local utilities will be less likely to run misleading, sensational stories. Talking points are available below to assist you.

Water utilities with Safe Drinking Water Act violations in recent years should expect to be identified in an interactive database/map published by EWG and the Times. The data compiled by EWG may be inaccurate, so all utilities – even those with no violations -- should be prepared to answer questions about their water quality.

Questions? Please contact Greg Kail, AWWA Public Affairs, [gkail@awwa.org](mailto:gkail@awwa.org), 303-734-3410.

## Suggested Utility Talking Points

- [Our utility] takes seriously our responsibility to provide safe, high quality water to our customers. We monitor frequently – even continuously -- for certain contaminants to assure that our water meets the high standards of the Safe Drinking Water Act.
- We are committed to transparency. Every year, we mail each customer a consumer confidence report that includes detailed information on water quality, including any violations of health protective standards under the Safe Drinking Water Act. We have additional information available on our web site and welcome calls from customers.
- We are pleased to report that our utility met every single federal and state standard last year and continues to meet those standards today.

or

As reported in our CCR report, this year we [explanation of violation followed by explanation of steps taken to correct the problem]

- Our customers can be assured that in the event of contamination that poses an urgent risk to public health, we will immediately notify customers and advise them of how to protect themselves.
- The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency sets standards under the safe Drinking Water Act for nearly 100 contaminants. In evaluating which contaminants to regulate, EPA takes into account potential human health impacts and occurrence data.
- The first and most effective way to prevent contamination of drinking water is to protect our precious water sources. We should all work for public policy that protects surface and groundwater from contamination, long before that water gets to our community's utility.

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*AWWA has submitted the below Letter to the Editor in response to the NY Times Dec. 8 article. Responses are limited to 150 words. The association will respond with a more lengthy op-ed column submission following Sunday's piece.*

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Editor:

The American Water Works Association shares the Times' interest in protecting water sources and assuring safe water at the tap (Dec. 8 story). The more we do to keep the environment free from pollution the easier and less costly it is to provide safe drinking water.

Fortunately, the quality of U.S. drinking water is better than ever. More than 96 percent of all health-based violations occur in small systems, which struggle to pay for treatment upgrades required by new, more protective standards. The Times could help by advocating for a federal water infrastructure bank that provides low-interest loans to communities needing to improve their systems.

Water consumers do not have to wait for a news story to learn about their water quality. Customers of community water systems receive annual reports that detail water quality and any violations. That information is readily available year-round via utility web sites or by a simple phone call.

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