



Charting New Waters

A Call to Action to Address U.S. Freshwater Challenges

The Looming Crisis: Early Warning Signals

- The U.S. Geological Survey estimates that U.S. water distribution systems lose 1.7 trillion gallons of water per year. Not only is this a staggering amount of lost water, but it also estimated that it is a \$2.6 billion cost to the nation.
- The U.S. is facing an investment gap of more than \$540 billion by 2019 for infrastructure upgrades to ensure safe drinking water and wastewater treatment.
- In Milwaukee, drinking water contamination left more than 400,000 residents ill and an estimated 69 people dead, and resulted in an estimated \$96.2 million in medical costs.
- A 2003 survey by the U.S. General Accounting Office revealed that at least 36 state water managers expected to experience water shortages in their states by 2013.
- Under the business-as-usual scenario of demand growth, water supplies in 70 percent of U.S. counties in the U.S. may be threatened by climate change and one-third may be at high risk by 2050.
- Almost nine billion gallons of bottled water were consumed in the U.S. in 2007, and three times that amount of freshwater was used in bottled water production. While U.S. consumers spend almost \$12 billion annually on bottled water, public investments in drinking water systems lags far behind that number.
- The nation's population is projected to increase to 392 million by 2050 – a 27 percent jump from the current figure of about 307 million. U.S. farmers and ranchers will need to produce food for these new mouths in addition to meeting growing global demand for food. Between 1950 and 2005, our population doubled and domestic water use for public supply tripled.
- An estimated 41 percent of U.S. freshwater withdrawals are being used for thermoelectric power generation, primarily coal, nuclear and natural gas; about 37 percent of the nation's water withdrawals go toward irrigated agriculture.
- The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) estimates that there are 240,000 water main breaks per year in the United States, jeopardizing the quality and supply of water for household and commercial uses.
- U.S. cities lose approximately 20 percent of their water to leaks and suffer 1.2 trillion gallons of wastewater spills each year.
- In 2007, the Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission reported 2,129 breaks in Montgomery and Prince George's County, Maryland – a 90-year record.
- A 2009 Gallup survey indicated that drinking-water pollution was the top environmental concern among the public, yet water customers are typically against even minimal rate increases needed for investment in new water projects.
- In western states, water managers have traditionally relied on snowpack in mountain ranges to melt throughout the spring and summer and supply water. But a 2005 study showed that snow runoff in the Colorado River decreased 2% during the 20th century, and predicted a 10% reduction by 2050.

