Project: TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE CENTER FOR SMALL WATER SYSTEMS

Brief Description: A Congressional appropriation is sought to develop professional training tools for those who design, manage, operate and regulate small public water systems, and to develop and test water treatment techniques and management tools for small systems.

Executive Summary: The goal of the Technical Assistance Center is to develop and distribute tools and knowledge that allow small public water systems to dispense safe, affordable drinking water while satisfying a complex and growing set of regulatory requirements.

Project Description: The Center's specialty is developing training courses for water-system operators and managers. These courses are also used by water engineers and drinking-water regulators and trainers. They cover the technical aspects of drinking-water characteristics and treatment, plus system management fundamentals and the pertinent regulations. They are used in all states and certified by most states for continuing-education credit. The program also sponsors university engineering teams to evaluate and report on innovative water treatment techniques for small water systems, and to develop cost-saving monitoring and assessment methods. These projects take place in partnership with public water systems.

Congressional Action Requested: An appropriation of $500,000 is sought from the EPA Office of Groundwater and Drinking Water.

Importance to Montana: If they aren't designed, managed and operated appropriately, small water systems provide a pathway for the spread of disease. Consequently, they're highly regulated. Montana has more than 1900 public water utilities, and those who manage and operate them face a major challenge in acquiring the technical assistance and training they need. Treatment techniques and management approaches developed for urban water utilities cannot be supported by utilities with small rate bases, minimal staff, and long distances to sources of help. In Montana and other rural states it is common for public water systems to be managed by community volunteers and staffed by part-time operators. Few utility personnel have formal education in finance, water science or public health. Therefore it's vital that they have access to simple, affordable treatment techniques that don't require professional managers and full-time operators with advanced knowledge of physics and chemistry. They also need calculation tools for developing budgets, assessing infrastructure and managing their systems. Finally, convenient, engaging training opportunities are essential. These must allow water system personnel to obtain training that is of high quality, pertinent to their needs, on a schedule they set themselves, in a format that is enjoyable and provides them with the required continuing-education credit. The Technical Assistance Center works in all these areas.

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