Browner Announces New Agenda and Partnership to Protect Drinking Water

[EPA press release - March 29, 1995]

EPA Administrator Carol M. Browner today announced a new "Agenda for Action" to strengthen the safety of the nation's drinking water. As part of this Agenda, she also announced a partnership with the nation's drinking water suppliers to upgrade drinking water quality.

The "Agenda for Action" is part of a new EPA study entitled "Strengthening the Safety of Our Drinking Water," which Browner made public today during remarks before the Association of Metropolitan Water Agencies, other groups representing the nation's water suppliers and state drinking water administrators.

Browner said, "Most households today receive safe, affordable water 24 hours a day, every day, all year round. And most water systems are meeting more protective standards than ever before. But we cannot take the safety of our drinking water for granted. More remains to be done."

According to the EPA report, microbial contaminants and their disinfection are among the greatest near-term challenges to safe drinking water--particularly those such as cryptosporidium, which may be resistant to traditional disinfectant methods.

Last year, the report states, some 30 million Americans were served by drinking water systems that violated one or more public health standards. Most of those violations involve standards for microbial contaminants. States report that over 1000 systems, serving about 13 million people, have not installed filters that are needed to help protect against water-borne disease.

"All of us recognize that we need more scientific and technological research to fully understand microbial threats to our health like cryptosporidium,"Browner said. "But we do know that there are steps we can take today to respond to the immediate needs, even while we look for the long-term answers. Through today's partnership, we will join together to take those steps, quickly, responsibly, and aggressively."

Under the new "Partnership for Safe Water," water suppliers will carry out a comprehensive assessment of their operations, maintenance, and management, and undertake corrective actions--short of major construction--to ensure the most protective systems possible, particularly against microbial contamination. In addition, some suppliers also will submit to a third-party assessment that has been shown effective in improving water system performance.

The Agenda includes five specific actions:

http://www.epa.gov/history/topics/drink/02.htm
1. provide consumers with more information about their drinking water, so they can participate in maintaining its quality;

2. target safety standards and resources first at contaminants that pose the greatest threats to human health, such as microbial contaminants, including cryptosporidium;

3. provide technical assistance to more small systems, communities and states for greater protection of source waters, better facility operation, and to prevent other problems;

4. give states more flexibility to address their individual problems and set program priorities, including monitoring regimes; and

5. increase investment in community drinking water facilities through such vehicles as a federal loan program.

"These are the common-sense steps we must take if we are to guarantee safe drinking water for the people of this country, now and in the future," Browner said. "These steps are consistent with a new, stronger Safe Drinking Water Act, which the Clinton Administration supported in the last Congress.

"This Administration will work with the new Congress to achieve balanced reforms to strengthen the Act," Browner said. "But we must also act now to provide the protection that will give the American people the safe drinking water they have come to expect."

The Agenda for Action and the new partnership represent an important step in the Clinton Administration's program to reinvent environmental regulation. Browner said, "Two weeks ago, President Clinton, Vice President Gore and I announced a dramatic overhaul of environmental regulation. A new common-sense approach to strengthening safe drinking water is a top priority of that reinvention."

National partners include EPA, the Association of Metropolitan Water Agencies, the American Water Works Association, the National Association of Water Companies, the Association of State Drinking Water Administrators, and the American Water Works Association Research Foundation.