

Are water and wastewater utilities ready for climate change?

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There are numerous case studies available on climate change adaptation among water and wastewater utilities. However, while some of these are collected in select reports, there is no comprehensive set of case studies showing the climate change challenges utilities are facing, what utilities are doing with respect to adaptation, and the efficacy of these measures. In order to address this gap, we are compiling case studies from dozens of different sources into one database and then coding each case study according to a consistent framework that identifies specific climate challenges and actions taken or being considered by the utility. The adaptation strategies are further categorized according to whether the action is planning focused, such as using climate models to predict future water supply, structural, like implementing a water conservation awareness campaign, or something that requires significant capital investment and/or new infrastructure, for instance, building a new dam. While these case studies provide a lot of useful information, we also want to hear directly from water utilities and others in the water sector about their climate change concerns, what their organizations have done in terms of adaptation, what the major barriers to adaptation are, and what information and resources are most needed to aid in the adaptation process.

Questions for the audience will include:

- How would you define climate change adaptation?
- What are some adaptation strategies that a water or wastewater utility might take?
- Does your organization regularly think about/discuss climate change? Why or why not?
- What are the specific climate change challenges/impacts that are of greatest concern to your organization and/or field?
- Has your organization conducted a climate change vulnerability assessment and what did the results show?
- Does your organization have a climate change adaptation plan? If so, what is included in it? How do you think climate change will impact the delivery of water and wastewater services in your area?
- What has your organization done to prepare for climate change, if anything?
- What are the most significant barriers preventing you from developing and/or implementing adaptation strategies?
- What are your highest priorities in terms of preparing for future impacts?
- What are the most effective adaptation strategies?
- If money were no object, what strategies would you like to implement?
- How should utilities be using their resources with respect to adaptation?
- What information is most helpful in terms of developing adaptation strategies?
- What information or other resources are most needed in order to enable climate change adaptation within your organization or field?
- Would your organization want to use a case study database like this and, if so, how?
- What information would you like to see more of in this type of database?
- What policies, if any, are needed in order to aid in and/or encourage climate change adaptation?