



AMWA Praises Fire Hydrant Legislation

November 22, 2013

New bill addresses EPA ruling that makes new hydrant inventories obsolete on January 4

Washington, D.C. – The Association of Metropolitan Water Agencies (AMWA) today urged Congress to quickly pass bipartisan legislation that will allow communities to continue using their existing inventories of brand-new fire hydrants after January 4 – circumventing a recent EPA ruling that would render thousands of new hydrants obsolete.

The “Community Fire Safety Act” (H.R. 3588) comes in response to a surprise October 22 ruling from U.S. EPA that would subject fire hydrants to new lead-content requirements slated to take effect early next year under the “Reduction of Lead in Drinking Water Act” (P.L. 111-380). That bill, which drew support from AMWA and other members of the water utility community when it went before Congress in 2010, was intended to reduce the amount of lead in pipes and plumbing fixtures that regularly deliver water for human consumption.

EPA’s surprise decision to apply the law to fire hydrants – less than three months before the law goes into effect on January 4 – could strand communities across the country with millions of dollars worth of brand-new, non-compliant hydrants after that date.

“Neither Congress nor the water utility community expected the ‘Reduction of Lead in Drinking Water Act’ to apply to fire hydrants,” said AMWA Executive Director Diane VanDe Hei. “In fact, the bill was based upon a California state law that has been interpreted to exclude hydrants. The ‘Community Fire Safety Act’ simply clarifies congressional intent and allows communities to continue replacing broken or inoperable hydrants with their on-hand inventories after January 4.”

Buying in bulk, metropolitan drinking water systems generally keep several months to several years worth of replacement fire hydrants in stock, so it would be impossible to turn over these inventories before the January 4 deadline. As a result, hydrants requiring replacement after that date would have to be left out-of-service for an unknown period of time until sufficient numbers of compliant hydrants could be procured, delivered, and installed – both draining community resources, and presenting a significant public safety risk.

“Our issue is not with the ‘Reduction of Lead in Drinking Water Act,’ which AMWA continues to support,” said VanDe Hei. “The problem lies with EPA’s decision to apply the Act to fire hydrants, which was completely unexpected and unworkable under a January 4 compliance deadline. We appreciate Congress working with us to correct this mistake.”

The Association of Metropolitan Water Agencies is an organization of the largest publicly owned drinking water suppliers in the United States.

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