



The Honorable David Ross
Assistant Administrator for Water
USEPA
1200 Pennsylvania Ave, NW
Washington, DC 20460

December 16, 2019

Re: AMWA comments on the draft National Water Reuse Action Plan

Dear Assistant Administrator Ross:

As an organization that represents drinking water utility managers, the National Water Reuse Action Plan is of great interest to AMWA's members. Water reuse is, as is noted in the draft plan, critical to ensuring water resilience, security and sustainability nationwide. Fit-for-purpose reuse, where the water is treated to a level that fits the application, allows for more flexibility in operations and a greater ability to manage future risk arising from uncertainties in demand, source availability and climatological conditions. However, we must continue to fund research related to public health impacts of microconstituents in reclaimed water and not forsake it at the cost of advancing a plan.

AMWA supports the ten general classification areas under which the 46 potential actions are grouped. Our attached comments make four overarching points in addition to specific recommendations for EPA as it moves forward to finalize the plan. AMWA supports EPA's intent to work with partners inside and outside of the federal government to finalize the plan and begin to implement it. AMWA looks forward to continuing to be an active participant in discussions with EPA and other partners in this effort.

If you have any questions about these comments, please contact Erica Brown, Chief Strategy and Sustainability Officer, at 202-331-2020 or brown@amwa.net.

Sincerely,

Diane VanDe Hei
Chief Executive Officer

cc: Jennifer McLain, OGWDW
Jeff Lape, OW

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1. EPA must commit funding to research related to informing the risk frameworks for fit-for-purpose reuse

On a national scale, consideration of water reuse is essential to ensuring water resilience, security and sustainability. However, EPA should not move forward with implementing a reuse action plan without committing to funding research related to understanding the health implications of microbial and microconstituents of concern in water. As more water will potentially become reclaimed and reused within the context of integrated water resource management, having information to effectively characterize health risks and develop risk assessments is critically important. This underlying science informs the key building blocks to the processes to set treatment performance objectives under fit-for-purpose reuse. EPA should not forsake funding research related to understanding the health implications of microbial and microconstituents of concern in reclaimed water in order to move forward with implementing a water reuse action.

2. EPA should clearly articulate the goals for the action plan, the key actions EPA will prioritize and a timeline for these activities.

With the development of the draft national action plan for water reuse, EPA has effectively outlined the business case for numerous water reuse applications. In order for the final plan to resonate nationally, EPA should commit to clearly articulating the plan goals and timeline and the key actions the agency has identified for the rollout of the final plan.

AMWA recognizes that the release of the action plan will not be the end of the story, but rather a first chapter with many to follow. Therefore, AMWA recommends that EPA begin with a one- to two-year plan to: identify criteria for success; identify the 10-12 key actions that meet those criteria and are already underway (or easily started up); and identify the follow-up actions that naturally build on the first batch of actions identified in the final plan rollout. Federal commitments and coordination should also be detailed in the final plan.

For example, there are several activities that need to be coordinated or progress simultaneously before moving forward because they are interdependent. AMWA notes the following two examples, which are critically important.

- A) Research coordination: Before funding new research, coordination needs to occur between the federal government, water sector and other stakeholders to identify a reuse research plan and funding priorities.
- B) Defining the stormwater capture and reuse problem statement: EPA should first define the stormwater capture and reuse challenges identified in **2.3.3: Convene Experts to Address Challenges Related to Stormwater Capture and Reuse** to determine how to go about working toward solutions, before convening experts to address challenges that are not clearly defined to stakeholders. This problem should be defined and communicated to stakeholders before proceeding with **2.2.11: Incorporate Stormwater Capture Considerations in Assessment of Stormwater Finance Needs and Opportunities** because having stakeholders and experts understand the definition of the issue will inform the ability to assess financing needs and opportunities for potential solutions.

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AMWA recommends that EPA also clearly identify what successful implementation of each action looks like, since success might be different for the varying activities and distinct types of reuse. It would also be helpful and most transparent for critical implementation steps and milestones to be identified so that progress is easily measured.

3. EPA must better describe and define the final actions that move forward in the plan and remove those actions that would duplicate or hamper efforts already underway.

In the draft plan, many of the actions noted lacked sufficient explanation for stakeholders to understand the meaning of the activity, therefore the actions could be interpreted differently by different groups, depending on one's frame of reference. AMWA recommends that EPA clarify and explain in more detail each action moving forward in the final plan. For several of the potential actions noted below, AMWA is unable to make informed public comment as to whether these actions should have priority or even be pursued in a national action plan. For others, AMWA recommends that EPA remove them from the plan.

Specifically, AMWA recommends EPA better explain the following if they are to be included as desired actions in a final action plan, or dropped entirely if identifying measurable criteria for success is not possible:

- *2.1.3 Incorporate water reuse and capture into integrated planning at local level*
- *2.2.6 Develop informational materials to better enable reuse in NPDES permits* (Question: Is this about integrated planning (i.e., EPA policy) or integrated water resources management?)
- *2.2.8 Advance alternative water reuse in federal operations through the federal energy management program*
- *2.2.10 Incorporate water reuse considerations in the development of civil works projects through the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Civil Works program*
- *2.2.14 Promote water reuse through the FEMA hazard mitigation programs*
- *2.5.2 Identify monitoring best practices for various sources of water and reuse applications* (Question: Is this guidance (from EPA) or best practices from the water community?)
- *2.8.1 Compile and develop water reuse program outreach and communication materials* (Questions: What kind of development is needed? What kind of water reuse is being noted here? Potable, agricultural, all of the above?)

It would be helpful for EPA to explain what all the potential actions related to stormwater and reuse are intended to mean, as well as to specify how they relate to one another. AMWA has several members in urbanized areas that are interested in this issue. Specifically, AMWA recommends EPA explain in more detail the following actions if they are to be included in the final action plan:

- *2.1.3 Incorporate water reuse and capture concepts into integrated planning efforts at the local level*
- *2.2.11 Incorporate stormwater capture considerations in assessment of stormwater finance needs and opportunities*
- *2.2.13 Enhancement of combined sewer overflow/ sanitary sewer overflow abatement strategies*

AMWA also recommends that EPA drop the following actions from the plan for the reasons described below:

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- *2.8.2 Develop a community of practice around water reuse:* Within the water sector, reuse is part of a one water discussion where a community of practice exists. Water reuse should be considered as part of an integrated water resource planning discussion rather than a separate community of practice. AMWA is uncertain about what a community of practice for reuse would look like for sectors outside of water and whether this is a useful action to pursue.
- *2.2.9 Revise guidance on disposal of unused medicines to better reflect source control benefits that support water reuse and recycling:* Source control benefits the water supply as a whole, and not just the concept of water reuse (i.e., one water). AMWA has worked with other water sector partners for several years to reach out to DEA, FDA and the private sector about revising flush guidelines for medicines. EPA has been engaged in some of these discussions already.
- *2.10.2 Establish goals for extent and types of water reuse in the United States:* AMWA does not recommend that this action move forward for two reasons. First, having goals for a certain percentage of water reused doesn't make sense when talking about water supply because municipalities are best equipped to determine the best solution for their local water supply portfolios based on their utility's unique resource options. This allows more flexibility in operations and a greater ability to manage future risk due to uncertainties in demand, source availability and climatological conditions. Second, a baseline about what is already being done in terms of different types of reuse needs to be established, and criteria for what success looks like needs to be defined before establishing goals in this context.

4. AMWA is eager and committed to play an active role in the national conversation about water reuse.

AMWA is committed to engaging and partnering with others on several issues in the plan, particularly in areas that support source water protection efforts that will help with reuse goals and where there could be a connection with potable reuse. Specific actions where AMWA envisions contributing are:

- 2.2.4: Enhance Wastewater Source Control through Local Pretreatment Programs to Support Water Reuse Opportunities for Municipal Wastewater
- 2.2.5: Compile and Develop Protection Strategies for Different Sources of Waters for Potential Reuse
- 2.5.2: Identify Monitoring Best Practices for Various Sources of Water and Reuse Applications – once clarification about what this action would be.

In addition, AMWA would like to be engaged in discussions about all actions and activities related to stormwater capture and fit-for-purpose options for reuse, particularly those noted under section 2 of these comments (2.1.3, 2.2.11, 2.2.13). AMWA's members bring different perspectives to the issue of stormwater capture and reuse, and it is important to communicate these perspectives to EPA and the greater water community as research and policy discussions move forward.

In conclusion, as the refinement and implementation of the plan is an iterative process, the association may recognize new actions where it wants to play a more active role. Similarly, as new potential actions are considered by EPA, AMWA recommends that the agency put a detailed description of these actions out for public comment so stakeholders can provide input about implementation steps and criteria. AMWA does not think that EPA should announce for

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implementation any actions or objectives that are not first released for public comment. AMWA appreciates EPA's recognition that the implementation of a national water reuse action plan should be open and transparent to the public and to stakeholders.