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UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20460

April 26, 2005

OFFICE OF
WATER

MEMORANDUM

TO: National Water Program Managers and Staff

FROM: Benjamin H. Grumbles /s/
Assistant Administrator

SUBJ: *National Water Program Guidance: FY 2006*

The National Water Program is making good progress toward the environmental and public health goals described in the EPA *Strategic Plan*. The *National Water Program Guidance: FY 2006* (see attached) outlines how EPA, States, Tribes, and others are continuing the important work of assuring that the Nation's waters are clean and safe. Key priorities for the water program in FY 2006 are summarized starting on page ii of the Executive Summary.

The *National Water Program Guidance: FY 2006* is modeled on the guidance for FY 2005 but includes some important differences.

- The number of Program Activity Measures reported on by EPA programs, States and Tribes is reduced by almost 20%.
- New efforts to improve the security of public water systems are described.
- The President's significantly expanded commitment for restoration and protection of wetlands, announced on Earth Day 2004, but not described in the FY 2005 national guidance, is addressed in an expanded wetlands protection strategy.
- The water quality strategy is revised and improved in several key ways. The strategy emphasizes the importance of waterbody restoration and demonstration of progress toward the goal of restoring 25% of impaired waters by 2012. Measures related to watershed management are revised and grouped together to illustrate the interconnectedness of this work. And, EPA Regions and States have wider options for reporting progress toward improved water quality.
- New initiatives by the Agency to focus grant resources on accomplishment of environmental results described in the *Strategic Plan* are explained and new materials to help project officers link grants to environmental results are provided.

The annual planning EPA, States, and Tribes do in conjunction with developing grant workplans is increasingly focused on key environmental outcomes. In the demanding budget environment we all work in, a strong planning process linked to environmental results is critical. In addition, the National Water Program needs to be able to show progress towards identified environmental and public health goals and the established program activity commitments. We also need to be able to document progress under the Program Assessment and Rating Tool (PART) developed by OMB and now applied to most water programs. Finally, we need to be able to demonstrate that we use the feedback we get concerning our progress to make prompt management decisions that reinforce success and address poor performance.

In order to strengthen the “feedback loop” that follows the annual planning process, the National Water Program needs to continue efforts to strengthen the management system described in Part III of this *Guidance*, including the following key elements:

- reporting of progress toward environmental and public health goal and program commitments at the mid-year (where data is available) and at the end of the year;
- continued efforts to share program perspectives among Regional and HQ program managers through HQ visits to Regional offices and continued collaboration to reflect Regional Plans and related priorities in national strategies;
- cooperation with the other agencies, such as the OMB, EPA Inspector General, Government Accountability Office, and National Academy of Sciences, to consider conclusions of evaluation studies of water programs and adopt recommended improvements where appropriate; and
- development of mid-year and end-of-year reports consolidating all information concerning National Water Program performance and making recommendations for management actions to strengthen performance.

If we reinforce a strong annual planning process with an equally effective performance assessment effort, the National Water Program will be well prepared to continue its strong performance in the years ahead.

Thank you for the outstanding work you have done to continue over thirty years of progress toward cleaner and safer water for all Americans. I look forward to working with you as we continue with this vital mission.

ATTACHMENT:

- *National Water Program Guidance: FY 2006*

cc: Charles Johnson, Chief Financial Officer; Office of the Chief Financial Officer
Michael Shapiro; Deputy Assistant Administrator for Water