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Drinking Water: U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Office of Inspector General Issues Report Addressing Agency Oversight of Small Community Water Systems Violators

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The United States Environmental Protection Agency ("EPA") Office of Inspector General ("OIG") issued a March 22nd report titled *Drinking Water: EPA Need to Take Additional Steps to Ensure Small Community Water Systems Designated as Serious Violators Achieve Compliance ("Report")*. See Report No. 16-P-0108.

OIG states it initiated the review to determine how EPA helps states and territories ensure that their small community water systems ("small systems") with serious violations come into compliance with health-based standards and Safe Drinking Water Act ("SDWA") requirements.

OIG defines "small community water systems" as including those systems providing drinking water to 3,300 or fewer residents year-round. This definition is stated to encompass 42,199 systems representing 82% of the community water systems in the United States. These systems serve an estimated 24.4 million people.

The OIG evaluation focused on Puerto Rico, Texas and Kansas.

OIG's *Report* determined that EPA efforts to bring small systems into compliance utilizing enforcement/compliance assistance resulted in some improvement. By way of example, OIG notes that in October 2011 EPA classified 2,252 small systems as serious violators (which included 193 systems with Tier 1 violations). Eighty-four systems in Puerto Rico, Texas and Kansas are stated to represent 45% of the 193 serious violators of Tier 1 violations identified in 2011.

OIG notes that of these 193 systems (with Tier 1 violations) that 43 of the systems had within 3 years returned to compliance. It further notes that for the 84 systems in Puerto Rico, Texas and Kansas only 14% had returned to compliance (therefore 72 systems remained noncompliant as of April 2015).

A number of systems were evaluated which OIG determined faced challenges making compliance difficult. The *Report* concludes that EPA and the states need to engage in a long-term, system-specific approach to attain compliance at systems where serious violations persist. It also states that it found inconsistencies in the application of the agency's Enforcement Response Policy.

The *Report* cites a number of recommendations for addressing these issues.

[Click here to download a copy of the OIG Report.](#)

