

# EPA awards \$2 million to Environmental Finance Center to help smallest water systems

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To improve the country's smallest water systems – those serving fewer than 10,000 people – the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) awarded \$2 million to the Environmental Finance Center at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Small water systems are managed by local and tribal governments, mobile home park owners, homeowners associations, shopping mall operators and hotel managers. These managers often have many other, very different responsibilities and may lack the technical, managerial and financial expertise required to run a good water system.

The finance center, housed in UNC's School of Government, will lead a team including the Environmental Finance Center Network and the American Water Works Association that will build the financial and managerial capabilities of those who manage these water systems. The EPA grant will fund classroom trainings, workshops, small group and one-on-one assistance, webcasts, online tools and resources. Collectively, these efforts will help small water system managers to understand their assets, find opportunities for cost savings and potential funding sources, look for ways to work with other systems, increase water and energy efficiency and develop sound fiscal policies and practices. The grant will allow the team to serve small water systems in all 10 EPA regions, all 50 states and all U.S. territories for 18 months.

“Small water systems comprise more than 94 percent of the nation's 157,000 public water systems and struggle much more to meet clean drinking water standards than their larger counterparts,” said Glenn Barnes, senior project director of the UNC Environmental Finance Center. “In 2011, 25 percent of the nation's smallest systems violated health-based standards in part due to their geographic isolation, small staff size, growing infrastructure needs and small customer bases.”

The UNC Environmental Finance Center is dedicated to enhancing the ability of governments and other organizations to provide environmental programs in fair, effective and financially sustainable ways. The work of the EFC is focused on a variety of environmental areas, including water resources, clean energy, solid waste management and land conservation.

The Environmental Finance Center Network is a university-based organization creating innovative solutions to the difficult how-to-pay issues of environmental protection and improvement. The network of 10 centers located throughout the United States works with the public and private sectors to promote sustainable environmental solutions while bolstering efforts to manage costs.

With approximately 50,000 members, the American Water Works Association is the largest nonprofit, scientific and educational association dedicated to managing and treating water.

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