



NATIONAL
RURAL WATER
ASSOCIATION

America's Largest Utility Membership

**TO: Subcommittee on Environment and Climate Change of the
Committee on Energy and Commerce**
FROM: National Rural Water Association (contact: Mike Keegan, Analyst)
DATE: May 7, 2019
RE: HR 1603

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on HR 1603, the "Alan Reinstein Ban Asbestos Now Act of 2019" introduced by Representative Bonamici.

Our member utilities have the very important public responsibility of complying with all applicable U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) regulations and for supplying the public with safe drinking water and sanitation every day.

The National Rural Water Association (NRWA) shares the Committee's goal of eliminating environmental public health risks. Local governments and state governments exist solely to protect and assist their citizens. The provision of safe drinking water is perhaps the most elemental purpose of local government and is generally recognized as one of the most essential public health, public welfare, and civic necessities.

Most all of the country's approximately 50,000 community drinking water systems (typically their local governments) rely on chlorine-based disinfection of the public's drinking water to ensure its safety by preventing microbiological contamination. Chlorine-based disinfection of public drinking water supplies in the early 20th century is often cited as one of the most important public health improvements of all time. Chlorine is added to public drinking water to guard against numerous pathogens including *Escherichia coli* bacteria, *Legionella*, *Giardia lamblia*, *Salmonella* bacteria, *Cryptosporidium*, etc.

We urge the committee to consider the essential need for a reliable and affordable supply of chlorine-based disinfection to allow for safe and affordable public drinking water.

We appreciate the Committee's continued assistance in advancing new funding and administrative policies to help the most economically disadvantaged consumers afford public water. Many stakeholders believe that economically disadvantaged populations are facing a crisis in affording their current water utility bills.

We appreciate the Committee's sensitivity in understanding that any new federal unfunded mandates on local governments can increase the cost of the public's essential drinking water service and force the most economically at-risk consumers (the great majority rely on chlorine-based disinfection) to be unable to afford their water bill or other necessary public health expenditures.

The National Rural Water Association is the country's largest public drinking water and sanitation supply organization with over 30,000 members. Safe drinking water and sanitation are generally recognized as the most essential public health, public welfare, and civic necessities.

Most U.S. water utilities (community water systems) regulated by the SDWA are small; over 91% of the country's approximately 50,000 drinking water supplies serve communities with fewer than 10,000 persons. Small and rural communities often have difficulty providing safe, affordable drinking water and sanitation due to limited economies of scale and lack of technical expertise. Similarly, when it comes to providing safe water and compliance with federal unfunded mandates, small and rural communities have a difficult time due to their limited customer base. This is compounded by the fact that small and rural communities often have lower median household incomes and higher water rates compared to larger communities. As a result, the cost of compliance is often dramatically higher per household.

NRWA is the nonprofit association of the federated state rural water associations with a combined membership of over 30,000 small and rural communities. NRWA is the country's largest water utility association and the largest community-based environmental organization. State Rural Water Associations are non-profit associations governed by elected board members from the membership.

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