
SECURING WATER AND WASTEWATER UTILITIES

Cybersecurity for the Water and Wastewater
Systems Sector

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1 The National Cybersecurity Center of Excellence (NCCoE), a part of the National Institute of
2 Standards and Technology (NIST), is a collaborative hub where industry organizations,
3 government agencies, and academic institutions work together to address businesses' most
4 pressing cybersecurity challenges. Through this collaboration, the NCCoE develops modular,
5 adaptable example cybersecurity solutions demonstrating how to apply standards and best
6 practices by using commercially available technology. To learn more about the NCCoE, visit
7 <https://www.nccoe.nist.gov/>. To learn more about NIST, visit <https://www.nist.gov/>.

8 This document identifies common scenarios across the Water and Wastewater Systems (WWS)
9 sector that may demonstrate higher-risk cybersecurity characteristics for WWS sector utilities.
10 The scenarios are informed by the project team's conversations with stakeholders across the
11 WWS sector. The NCCoE project team will address each scenario in collaboration with members
12 of the WWS sector and vendors of cybersecurity solutions. The resulting reference design will
13 detail an approach that can be used by WWS sector organizations to plan for and mitigate
14 cybersecurity risks.

15 **ABSTRACT**

16 The U.S. Water and Wastewater Systems (WWS) sector has been undergoing a digital
17 transformation. Many sector stakeholders are utilizing data-enabled capabilities to improve
18 utility management, operations, and service delivery. The ongoing adoption of automation,
19 sensors, data collection, network devices, and analytic software may also increase
20 cybersecurity-related vulnerabilities and associated risks.

21 The NCCoE has undertaken a program to determine common scenarios for cybersecurity risks
22 among WWS utilities. This project will profile several areas, including asset management, data
23 integrity, remote access, and network segmentation. The NCCoE will also explore the utilization
24 of existing commercially available products to mitigate and manage these risks. The findings can
25 be used as a starting point by WWS utilities in mitigating cybersecurity risks for their specific
26 production environment. This project will result in a freely available NIST Cybersecurity Practice
27 Guide.

28 **KEYWORDS**

29 Asset management; data integrity; network segmentation; remote access; SCADA; water and
30 wastewater utility

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44 Certain commercial entities, equipment, products, or materials may be identified in this
45 document in order to describe an experimental procedure or concept adequately. Such
46 identification is not intended to imply recommendation or endorsement by NIST or NCCoE, nor
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50 Organizations are encouraged to review all draft publications during public comment periods
51 and provide feedback. All publications from NIST's National Cybersecurity Center of Excellence
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53 Comments on this publication may be submitted to water_nccoe@nist.gov.

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73 **1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

74 **Purpose**

75 This document outlines a National Cybersecurity Center of Excellence (NCCoE) project that will
76 develop example cybersecurity solutions to protect the infrastructure in the operating
77 environments of WWS sector utilities. The increasing adoption of network-enabled technologies
78 by the sector merits the development of best practices, guidance, and solutions to ensure that
79 the cybersecurity posture of facilities is safeguarded.

80 This project explores four areas of concern identified by WWS stakeholders, namely: asset
81 management, data integrity, remote access, and network segmentation. These areas have been
82 under review to determine the common features among sector stakeholders and to identify
83 issues being faced by broad segments of the sector. For this project, the focus is on municipal-
84 scale utilities.

85 Critical infrastructure issues in the WWS sector present several unique challenges. Utilities in the
86 sector typically cover a wide geographic area regarding piped distribution networks and
87 infrastructure together with centralized treatment operations. The supporting operational
88 technologies (OT) underpinning this infrastructure are likely reliant on supervisory control and
89 data acquisition (SCADA) systems which provide data transmission across the enterprise,
90 sending sensor readings and signals in real time. These systems also control the automated
91 processes in the production environment which is linked to the distribution network.
92 Additionally, many OT devices are now converging upon information technology (IT) capability
93 with the advent of Industrial Internet-of-Things (IIoT) devices and platforms, such as cloud-
94 based SCADA and smart monitoring.

95 This project will identify challenges and develop a reference architecture that demonstrates
96 solutions using commercially available products and services. The project described herein also
97 serves to initiate a broad discussion with WWS sector stakeholders, both from the public and
98 private sectors, to identify stakeholders and commercial solutions providers. The commercial
99 solutions will be integrated into a pilot-lab environment to develop a reference architecture and
100 case study.

101 This project will result in a publicly available NIST Cybersecurity Practice Guide which will include
102 a detailed implementation guide of the practical steps needed to implement a cybersecurity
103 reference design that addresses these challenges.

104 **Scope**

105 This project description profiles several areas to strengthen the cybersecurity posture within the
106 operational environment of WWS facilities. The following areas will be explored:

- 107 • Asset Management – inventory, visibility, criticality
- 108 • Data Integrity
- 109 • Remote Access
- 110 • Network Segmentation

111 **Assumptions**

112 The project will demonstrate solutions to improve the cybersecurity posture of WWS
113 stakeholders and is guided by the following assumptions:

- 114 • WWS infrastructure that adequately reflects operational capabilities is available for
115 solution testing
- 116 • A range of commercially available solutions exist and are readily available to sector
117 stakeholders to demonstrate solutions to the identified challenges

118 **Challenges**

119 There are a wide range of capabilities among WWS utilities regarding cyber-enabled operations.
120 Identifying challenges that can be representative in addressing a broad range of issues may be
121 difficult. Also, lab-constructed test solutions may not address the complexities of real-world
122 operational scenarios. The NCCoE does not provide prescriptive solutions, but rather
123 demonstrates illustrative cases that may be voluntarily adopted by a large segment of the
124 sector.

125 **Background**

126 There is apparent general consensus from WWS stakeholders that additional cybersecurity
127 implementation references are needed to assist in the protection of its critical infrastructure.
128 The advancement of network-based approaches, together with an ongoing increase in cyber
129 threats, merit the need for sector-wide improvements in cybersecurity protections. The NCCoE,
130 together with its stakeholders, is undertaking this project to identify and demonstrate
131 cybersecurity solutions for the sector. The project will build on existing sector guidance to
132 provide information for the direct implementation of readily available commercial solutions
133 towards the most pressing cybersecurity challenges faced by sector utilities.

134 This project references efforts undertaken by Federal agencies to ensure the protection of water
135 and wastewater providers. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) [1] in its role as the
136 Sector Risk Management Specific Agency (SRMA) provides coordination in responding to cyber
137 incidents and support in the form of tools, exercises, and technical assistance. The Department
138 of Homeland Security's (DHS) Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) [2] leads
139 the efforts to protect assets, mitigate vulnerabilities, and reduce impacts from potential cyber
140 incidents.

141 WWS organizations have also contributed to sector awareness and capacity building. The
142 American Water Works Association (AWWA) provides resources and guidance for aiding water
143 systems in evaluating cybersecurity risks. The AWWA Cybersecurity Assessment Tool and
144 Guidance, referenced herewith, assists utilities in identifying exposure to cyber risks, setting
145 priorities, and executing appropriate and proactive cybersecurity strategies in support of Section
146 2013 of America's Water Infrastructure Act of 2018 (AWIA) [3]. Additionally, the Water
147 Environment Federation (WEF) leads the effort among wastewater utilities and is providing
148 guidance and information in the identification of sector needs and priorities [4]. The Water
149 Information Sharing and Analysis Center (WaterISAC) is an all-threats security information
150 source for the water and wastewater sector, providing invaluable information and resources to
151 the WSS sector including the "15 Cybersecurity Fundamentals for Water and Wastewater
152 Utilities." [5]

153 2 SCENARIOS

154 Based on discussions with WWS utilities and stakeholders, the NCCoE has identified four
155 categories of interest that have demonstrated high risk characteristics for WWS utilities. The
156 NCCoE plans to explore specific situational challenges within each scenario which will be
157 addressed in collaboration with public and private stakeholders. The goal is to demonstrate a
158 solution set for each scenario-based challenge with commercially available products in an
159 environment that replicates a real-world operational facility in the WWS.

160 Scenario 1: Asset Management

161 Common situations may exist in WWS facilities that may produce additional cybersecurity risks:

- 162 • The existing equipment and software inventory does not include offsite or remote
163 devices, creating a gap in managing their security configurations.
- 164 • Third-party devices are not included in the asset management plan.
- 165 • The production facility has PLCs and sensors that cannot be updated past a specific
166 security revision.
- 167 • Automatic updates are either disabled or set to manual.
- 168 • Non-operating devices are on the network (such as HVAC or smart IoT devices) which
169 may increase the attack surface.
- 170 • The entire operational configuration is not backed-up or archived in the event of a
171 cyber-related incident.

172 In these cases, the utility may be unaware or lack the capability to comprehensively assess the
173 disposition of their assets. Malicious actors can use unpatched vulnerabilities in component
174 software to establish an entry point to implant software.

175 The expected security requirements / outcomes for asset management are:

- 176 • Demonstrate techniques to identify, categorize, and manage all network-enabled
177 devices.
- 178 • Detect potential risks on the network from vulnerable network equipment, such as
179 unpatched devices or software flaws.
- 180 • Provide solutions for operational system archiving and back-up that can be utilized to
181 restore the system to full functionality in the event of a cyber incident.

182 Scenario 2: Data Integrity

183 Secure and reliable communications among network devices may be compromised through
184 several scenarios, such as:

- 185 • Data-in-transit is not encrypted, allowing for cleartext transmissions and eavesdropping
186 on packets.
- 187 • Direct monitoring of system activity allows spoofing and man-in-the-middle attacks on
188 the network.
- 189 • Threat actors can simulate device communications with invalid data packets and
190 diminish network availability.
- 191 • Third-party integrators provide updates and changes to existing operational software
192 without aligning the requirements with those of the utility, potentially creating a gap in
193 data security.

194 The expected security requirements / outcomes for data integrity are:

- 195 • Integrity of data-at-rest and data-in-transit is protected. Lack of protection and integrity
196 compromises are detected.
- 197 • Demonstrate methods of secure communications to prevent potential system
198 compromise or diminished network availability.
- 199 • Provide solutions to allow sandbox testing for network devices and equipment prior to
200 deployment in a production environment, to ensure data integrity in communications.

201 **Scenario 3: Remote Access**

202 Threat actors can obtain access to the network through many avenues, such as credential
203 harvesting, phishing campaigns, or access to cleartext identification and authentication data.

204 The following scenarios can then unfold:

- 205 • SCADA software uses generic usernames and passwords, allowing multiple users to
206 access the system without unique authentication.
- 207 • Server ports are not restricted to minimum necessary for network traffic, increasing the
208 attack surface.
- 209 • Remote access to the network does not require multifactor authentication.
- 210 • Third-party hardware and service providers have broad access to the operational
211 technologies, which may also lead to other network areas.

212

213 The expected security requirements / outcomes are:

- 214 • Demonstrate methods to ensure security policy and practice safeguards are configured
215 on all devices and systems on the network, such as multifactor authentication and
216 elimination of shared accounts.
- 217 • Provide a mechanism to enforce protocols such as rules or role-based controls, such
218 that access is dependent on levels of responsibility.
- 219 • Detect potential compromise on the network by intrusion or anomalous behavior.
- 220 • Demonstrate methods to protect against and remediate malicious activity.

221 **Scenario 4: Network Segmentation**

222 Sector best practices call for network segmentation, which is the division of the network into
223 smaller, logical partitions by either physical or virtual means, based on similarities in function or
224 permissions. The lack of network segmentation may be found in the following types of
225 scenarios:

- 226 • There is no manual method to disconnect industrial control system (ICS) components
227 from the general network.
- 228 • Secure operations data is not transferred through an actively managed router via a
229 network demilitarized zone (DMZ) to utility managers.
- 230 • The network is not segmented (by virtual local area networks or software defined
231 networks) such that communications can flow from any part of the enterprise to
232 another.
- 233 • Digital communications between centralized supervisory platforms and process control
234 systems are not implemented through a DMZ.
- 235 • Access to critical equipment for plant operations are available from unsecured
236 terminals, providing unauthorized accessibility.

237 The expected security requirements / outcomes are:

- 238 • Provide solutions for the use of commercially available products, such as firewalls or
239 software defined networks, which would provide logical segmentation of the enterprise
240 network.
- 241 • Detect vulnerabilities such as congestion, broad network perimeters, or topologies that
242 permit unauthorized access.
- 243 • Demonstrate the effectiveness of DMZ-related solutions as an alternative to an entirely
244 air-gapped facility.
- 245 • Provide solutions to logically secure sensitive access to high-risk operational
246 components.

247 **3 HIGH-LEVEL ARCHITECTURE**

248 This section proposes a simplified reference architecture as a model to develop the project
249 scenarios. On a broad scale, a municipal WWS utility covers a wide area, with an architecture
250 typified in Figure 1.

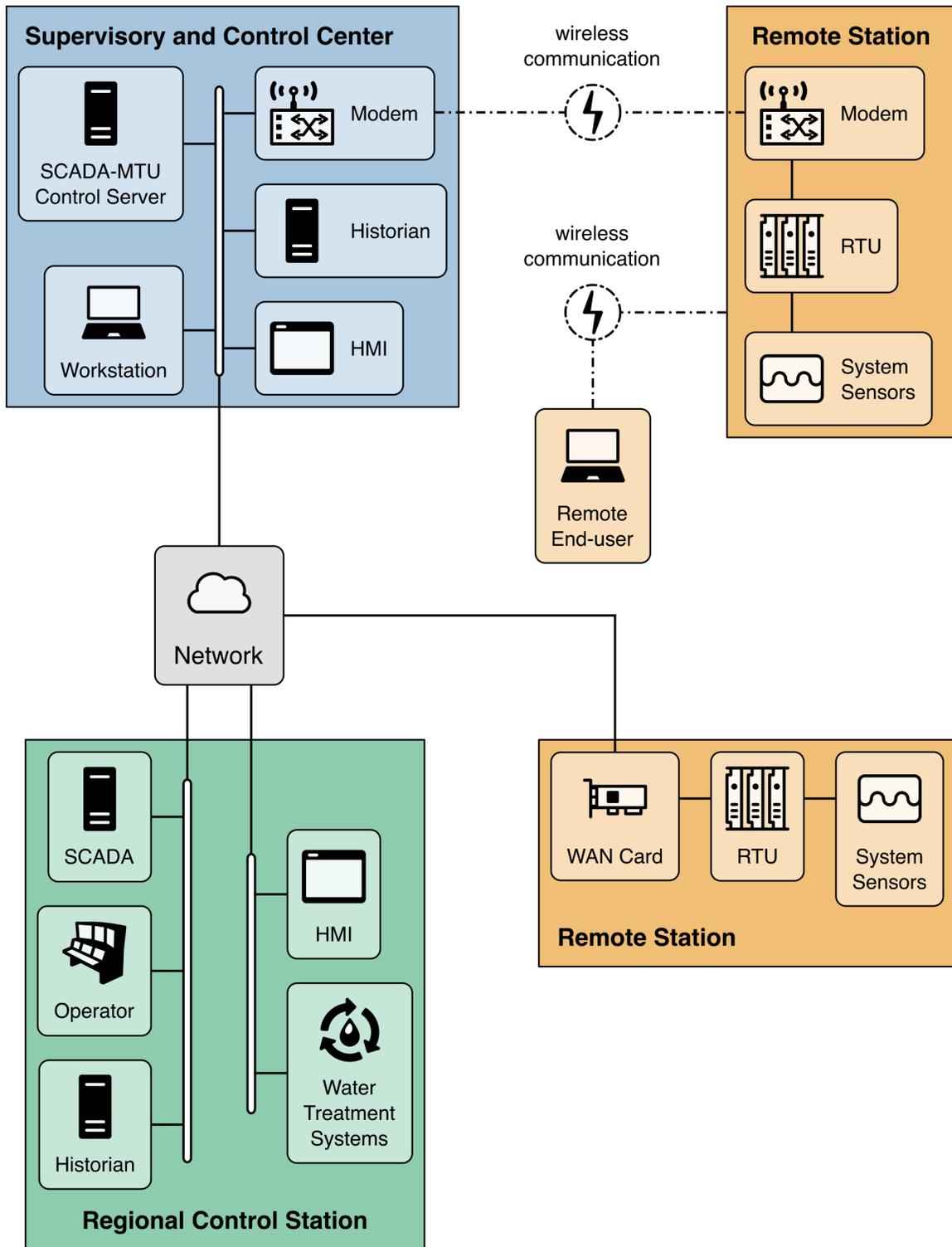


Figure 1 Example WWS Infrastructure

253 As shown in Figure 1, a WWS utility generally consists of the following components:

- 254 • **Centralized:** supervisory capability with remote access to servers and historians
255 collecting data for management and business
- 256 • **Regional:** localized treatment centers including wired network servers, supervisor
257 control and data acquisition (SCADA), human-machine interface (HMI), and
258 programmable logic controllers (PLCs) with process controls data and sensor readings
- 259 • **Remote:** a wide-area network SCADA with wireless telemetry to monitor remote
260 infrastructure such as pump stations and water distribution network
- 261 • Additionally, PLCs and controls distributed among the network and pump stations, with
262 sensors to enable logging of metrics such as pressure, temperature, and physical-
263 chemical characteristics

264 In this diagram, the WWS utility operates a centralized treatment facility, with several regional
265 sub-facilities depending on the geographic requirements of the municipality. The supervisory
266 and control center can connect with the information from operations and stations via the
267 Internet through remote access capabilities. Network segmentation ideally creates a logical
268 separation among the clusters of connected devices.

269 **Requirements**

270 The project will identify specialized cybersecurity capabilities from collaborating vendors to
271 address the vulnerabilities identified in the previous section. To demonstrate the reference
272 architecture, collaborating stakeholders need to supply products and technology that offer:

273 Asset Management: Asset discovery and visibility solutions identify all assets that exist on the
274 network, whether physical, virtual, on- or off-premises, or on the cloud. These software
275 solutions also provide information on existing gaps in configurations, product versions, or
276 protocols that require updates or enforcement of security policies. Improving asset discovery
277 and visibility is generally accomplished by the classification and categorization of all network
278 devices, followed by an audit and compliance stage. Enforcement of a predetermined security
279 posture can be accomplished by automation and orchestration of baseline requirements.

280 Data Integrity: Data integrity solutions will provide capabilities to assure communications within
281 the OT environment are not modified or replaced in transit. These technologies will determine if
282 integrity has been compromised, such as in data modification or spoofing. They provide
283 capabilities to prevent loss of integrity, such as cryptographic mechanisms and validation
284 techniques. These capabilities would also integrate with existing security information and event
285 management systems in the capture and analysis of network traffic data.

286 Remote Access: Capabilities which serve to provide and enforce access policies will be included
287 in this project. These solutions ensure that authorized communications can take place among
288 network devices and prevent unauthorized access or information exchanges from unknown
289 systems. The capabilities can be configured to monitor and log for unauthorized attempts to
290 authenticate onto the network, providing visibility into the anomalous behavior. In addition,
291 these systems may need to work in tandem with existing identity and access management
292 solutions within the WWS entity, such as federated systems, hybrid cloud / IT networks,
293 multifactor authentication, and IIoT device management.

294 Network Segmentation: Network segmentation capabilities will provide logically isolated
295 network subsets that can be managed more efficiently and effectively. Segmentation is
296 accomplished by establishing zones, or logical groups, of devices and infrastructure based on

297 commonalities such as process or operational area, ICS protocol, or accessibility requirements.
298 Segmentation provides a more detailed level of authorization and access, visibility into network
299 flows among critical assets and infrastructure, and control of device management, and
300 minimizes the potential harm from threats by isolating them to a limited part of the network.

301 4 RELEVANT STANDARDS AND GUIDANCE

- 302 • The NIST *Framework for Improving Critical Infrastructure Cybersecurity* (NIST
303 Cybersecurity Framework [CSF]) is a tool to help organizations understand cybersecurity
304 risks associated with their business and define objectives for managing those risks. The
305 framework consists of three components: the Core, the Implementation Tiers, and CSF
306 Profiles. The core organizes cybersecurity into five functions: Identify, Protect, Detect,
307 Respond, and Recover. Each function is further subdivided into categories and
308 subcategories that describe outcomes and objectives related to the function. The four
309 tiers of the CSF describe the level of rigor and sophistication in an organization's
310 cybersecurity program. They provide a basis for understanding and reasoning about the
311 degree to which cybersecurity is or needs to be integrated into business processes.
312 Lastly CSF profiles are used to relate business functions to cybersecurity functions
313 helping an organization understand how cybersecurity can contribute to business
314 outcomes.
- 315 • NIST SP 800-82r3 IPD, *Guide to Operational Technology (OT) Security*, provides guidance
316 for securing operational technology systems while preserving performance, reliability,
317 and safety of these systems. The publication addresses establishing an OT cybersecurity
318 program, managing OT cybersecurity risk, developing an OT cybersecurity architecture,
319 and applying the NIST CSF to OT systems.
- 320 • WaterISAC, "15 Cybersecurity Fundamentals for Water and Wastewater Utilities",
321 <https://www.waterisac.org/fundamentals>. This guide, originally published in 2012 and
322 updated in 2019, describes best practices for IT and OT cybersecurity organized under
323 fifteen high-level categories.
- 324 • American Water Works Association (AWWA) Cybersecurity Risk Management Tool,
325 [Home Page \(awwa.org\)](http://www.awwa.org). Using this tool, a user answers 22 questions about their control
326 system environment and the tool generates a prioritized list of needed cybersecurity
327 controls.
- 328 • ISO/IEC 62443 is a collection of standards that address requirements and methods of
329 managing cybersecurity control systems and operational technology. The standards are
330 organized in four layers: general, policy and procedures, system, and component.

331 5 SECURITY CONTROL MAP

332 This table maps the characteristics of the commercial products that the NCCoE will apply to this
333 cybersecurity challenge to the applicable standards and best practices described in the
334 Framework for Improving Critical Infrastructure Cybersecurity, and to other NIST activities. This
335 exercise is meant to demonstrate the real-world applicability of standards and best practices but
336 does not imply that products with these characteristics will meet an industry's requirements for
337 regulatory approval or accreditation.

338 Table 1: Security Control Map

Function	Category	Subcategory	NIST 800-53, Revision 5 Control(s)	AWWA Cybersecurity Assessment Tool Controls	Water ISAC 15 Cybersecurity Fundamentals
IDENTIFY (ID)	Asset Management (ID.AM): The data, personnel, devices, systems, and facilities that enable the organization to achieve business purposes are identified and managed consistent with their relative importance to business objectives and the organization’s risk strategy.	ID.AM-1: Physical devices and systems within the organization are inventoried.	CM-8	PM-1	Perform Asset Inventories
		ID.AM-2: Software platforms and applications within the organization are inventoried.	CM-8	PM-1	Perform Asset Inventories
PROTECT (PR)	Identity Management, Authentication, and Access Control (PR.AC): Access to physical and logical assets and associated facilities is limited to authorized users, processes, and	PR.AC-1: Identities and credentials are issued, managed, verified, revoked, and audited for authorized devices, users, and processes.	IA-1, IA-2, IA-3, IA-4, IA-5, IA-7, IA-8, IA-9, IA-10, IA-11, IA-12	IA-1, SI-3, SC-2, IA-11	Enforce User Access Controls
		PR.AC-3: Remote access is managed	AC-17, AC-19, AC-20	SC-12	Enforce User Access Controls

Function	Category	Subcategory	NIST 800-53, Revision 5 Control(s)	AWWA Cybersecurity Assessment Tool Controls	Water ISAC 15 Cybersecurity Fundamentals
	devices and is managed consistent with the assessed risk of unauthorized access to authorized activities and transactions.	PR.AC-4: Access permissions and authorizations are managed, incorporating the principles of least privilege and separation of duties.	AC-1, AC-2, AC-3, AC-5, AC-6, AC-14, AC-16, AC-24	IA-1, CM-3, CM-4, PS-2, PM-5, IA-10, IA-3, IA-4, IA-11	Enforce User Access Controls
		PR.AC-5: Network integrity is protected (e.g., network segregation, network segmentation).	AC-4, AC-10, SC-7, SC-10, SC-20	SC-15	Minimize Control System Exposure
	Data Security (PR.DS): Information and records (data) are managed consistent with the organization’s risk strategy to protect the confidentiality, integrity, and availability of information.	PR.DS-1: Data at rest is protected.	MP-2, MP-3, MP-4, MP-5, MP-6, MP-7, MP-8, SC-28	SC-1, MP-1, PM-5	
		PR.DS-2: Data in transit is protected.	SC-8, SC-11	SC-1, SC-7	Minimize Control System Exposure
		PR.DS-6: Integrity-checking mechanisms are used to verify software, firmware, and information integrity.	SI-7, SI-10	SI-2, SI-1	
	Information Protection Processes and Procedures (PR.IP): Security policies (that address purpose, scope, roles, responsibilities,	PR.IP-1: A baseline configuration of information technology/industrial control systems is created and maintained.	CM-2, CM-3, CM-4, CM-5, CM-6, CM-7, CM-9, SA-10	SA-2, SA-3, SC-10	

Function	Category	Subcategory	NIST 800-53, Revision 5 Control(s)	AWWA Cybersecurity Assessment Tool Controls	Water ISAC 15 Cybersecurity Fundamentals
	management commitment, and coordination among organizational entities), processes, and procedures are maintained and used to manage protection of information systems and assets.	PR.IP-3: Configuration change control processes are in place.	CM-3, CM-4, SA-10	SA-2	Develop and Enforce Cybersecurity Policies and Procedures
	Protective Technology (PR.PT): Technical security solutions are managed to ensure the security and resilience of systems and assets, consistent with related policies, procedures, and agreements.	PR.PT-4: Communications and control networks are protected.	AC-4, AC-17, AC-18, CP-8, SC-7	SC-9, SC-14, SC-23, SC-24, SC-15, SC-8, SC-25, SC-3	Minimize Control System Exposure
DETECT (DE)	Anomalies and Events (DE.AE): Anomalous activity is detected, and the potential impact of	DE.AE-1: A baseline of network operations and expected data flows for users and systems is established and managed.	AC-4, CA-3, CM-2, SC-16, SI-4		Minimize Control System Exposure

Function	Category	Subcategory	NIST 800-53, Revision 5 Control(s)	AWWA Cybersecurity Assessment Tool Controls	Water ISAC 15 Cybersecurity Fundamentals
	events is understood.	DE.AE-2: Detected events are analyzed to understand attack targets and methods.	AU-6, CA-7, RA-5, IR-4, SI-4	SC-4, SC-5	Implement Threat Detection and Monitoring
		DE.AE-4: Impact of events is determined.	CP-2, IR-4, RA-3, SI-4	SC-4, SC-5	Implement Threat Detection and Monitoring
	Security Continuous Monitoring (DE.CM): The information system and assets are monitored to identify cybersecurity events and verify the effectiveness of protective measures.	DE.CM-1: The information system and assets are monitored to identify cybersecurity events and verify the effectiveness of protective measures.	AU-12, CA-7, CM-3, SC-5, SC-7, SI-4	SC-4, SC-5, SC-6	Implement Threat Detection and Monitoring
		DE.CM-7: Monitoring for unauthorized personnel, connections, devices, and software is performed.	AU-12, CA-7, CM-3, CM-8, PE-3, PE-6, PE-20, SI-4		Implement Threat Detection and Monitoring
		DE.CM-8: Vulnerability scans are performed.	RA-5		Embrace Vulnerability Management
Respond (RS)	Mitigation (RS.MI): Activities are performed to prevent expansion of an event, mitigate its effects, and eradicate the incident.	RS.MI-3: Newly identified vulnerabilities are mitigated or documented as accepted risks.	CP-1, RA-3, RA-5		Embrace Vulnerability Management

339 **APPENDIX A REFERENCES**

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356 **APPENDIX B ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS**

DMZ	Demilitarized Zone
IIoT	Industrial Internet of Things
ICS	Industrial Control Systems
NCCoE	National Cybersecurity Center of Excellence
NIST	National Institute of Standards and Technology
OT	Operational Technology
PLC	Programmable Logic Controllers
SCADA	Supervisor Control and Data Acquisition
WWS	Water and Wastewater Systems