

Public Water System Operational Considerations during the *COVID-19 Pandemic*

*(*thanks to our friends at the Ohio and Illinois Section AWWA for sharing this resource)*

Foundation: Public Water Systems are essential to the health and safety of the community. We must continue to operate even in the face of a potential crisis.

Items for consideration during this time:

1. Consider the essential functions of the PWS.
 - i. Treating and supplying adequate sources of potable water.
 - ii. Delivering that water to the end-users.
2. The number one concern during this pandemic is maintaining adequate staffing levels of critical personnel, such as water treatment plant operators, distribution system crew repair persons, and maintenance staff.
 - i. Be prepared to operate with significantly reduced staffing levels.
 - ii. What steps can be taken to ensure adequate staffing:
 - a. Practice Social Distancing at work and home- Limit interactions between the staff so that a single sick individual does not infect other employees.
 - b. Make sure sick employees stay home or are sent home.
 - c. Be prepared to isolate critical staff at the facilities for multiple days at a time.
 - d. Split up staffing and keep individuals home on paid, on-call leave while others work and then switch or stagger start times to avoid crowding.
 - e. Consider who could support operations if needed, such as supervisors, former employees who now work in other classifications, recently retired employees, contractors.
 - f. Review and update SOP's for critical functions so that substitute employees can perform these tasks if called upon.
 - g. Of course proper hand washing practices and additional cleaning of facilities.
3. In case of further government directives that restrict travel locally, or regionally, make sure your employees have the proper ID's, or credentials, to be able to respond to work, or emergencies, involving our vital public service.
 - i. Have a backup laboratory in place for regulatory sampling analysis, in case your laboratory of choice becomes unavailable.
 - a. Reduce your sample collector's exposure to the public during compliance sampling, where able. Provide PPE.
 - ii. Eliminate public/staff interfaces such as front desks, lobbies, or bill paying windows where able. Most, if not all, functions can still be accomplished by phone, online, or via mail.
 - iii. Cancel group meetings and instead delay or meet remotely by teleconference or other.
4. The second item of concern is the potential interruption of the normal supply chain for critical chemicals and repair parts.

- i. Make sure that critical treatment chemicals are fully stocked. Don't allow these supplies to get too low as there is a very real chance that standard supply chains could be hampered or delayed.
 - ii. Make certain fundamental repair parts are fully stocked—items such as lengths of replacement pipe, pipe repair clamps, sleeves, valves, etc. Make sure equipment is in good repair and ready to go.
5. For those with SCADA automation, set up and test remote monitoring and control of water treatment plants.
6. Do NOT rely on cell phones for communication. Regional emergencies overload wireless systems and cell phone communication during these times is sporadic or non-existent. Instead, utilize radio and land-line communication systems.
7. Many utilities only have a single financial person on staff to enter purchase orders and pay bills. Make sure a second individual is prepared to take over in an emergency. They need to be at least able to pay the power bills and order necessary supplies.
8. Water Shut-Offs for delinquent payments are being suspended and water service restored across the state. During this crisis, customers need to have access to water for washing, hydration, and other fundamental health needs.
9. Ensure your lines of communication are open between your utility and your local first-responders. Know who to call. Confirm you will be involved in your local Emergency Operations Center when necessary.
10. Contact Hour Training: Many of the standard sources of training have been temporarily suspended. Consider how certified personnel may obtain required contact hours by remote or in-house training.