

Public Water System Operational Considerations during the COVID-19 Pandemic

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.
 - a. **Treating and supplying adequate sources of potable water.**
 - b. **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 repairpersons, and maintenance staff.
 - a. Be prepared to operate with significantly *reduced* staffing levels.
 - b. What steps can be taken to ensure adequate staffing:
 - i. Practice Social Distancing at work and at home- Limit interactions between staff so that a single sick individual does not infect other employees.
 - ii. Make sure sick employees stay home or are sent home.
 - iii. Be prepared to isolate critical staff at the facilities for multiple days at a time.
 - iv. Split up staffing and keep individuals home on paid, on-call leave while others work and then switch.
 - v. Consider who could support operations if needed such as supervisors; former employees who now work in other classifications; recently retired employees; contractors.
 - vi. Review and update SOP's for critical functions so that substitute employees can perform these tasks if called upon.
 - vii. Of course proper handwashing practices and additional cleaning of facilities.
 - c. Have a backup laboratory in place for regulatory sampling analysis, in case your laboratory of choice becomes unavailable.
 - i. Reduce your sample collector's exposure to the public during compliance sampling, where able. Provide PPE.
 - d. 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.
 - e. Cancel group meetings and instead delay or meet remotely by teleconference or other.
3. The second item of concern is potential interruption of the normal **supply chain** for critical chemicals and repair parts.
 - a. Make sure that critical treatment chemicals are fully stocked. Do not allow these supplies to get too low as there is a very real chance that normal supply chains could be hampered or delayed.
 - b. Make sure 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.
4. For those with SCADA automation, set up and test remote monitoring and control of water treatment plants.
5. 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 landline communication systems.



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6. 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 basic supplies.
7. **Water Shut-Offs** for delinquent payments are being suspended and water service restored across the state. During this crisis, it's important for customers to have access to water for washing, hydration, and other fundamental health needs.
8. Contact Hour Training: Many of the normal sources of training have been temporarily suspended. Consider how certified personnel may obtain required contact hours by remote or in-house training.

For additional information, please utilize the following resources

Ohio EPA

Division of Drinking and Ground Waters

epa.ohio.gov/ddagw

614-644-2752

Ohio Department of Health

1-833-4ASKODH

coronavirus.ohio.gov

USEPA

www.epa.gov/coronavirus/coronavirus-and-drinking-water-and-wastewater

Center for Disease Control

www.cdc.gov

www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/php/water.html

www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers