



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

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OFFICE OF DRINKING WATER

UPDATED: March 13, 2020, 4:00 p.m.

To: Waterworks Owners in Virginia

From: Dwayne Roadcap, Director of Office of Drinking Water

Re: Ideas to Reduce Impacts of COVID-19 in Your Waterworks

The Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) has spread to numerous states including Virginia. Water sector professionals must stay informed regarding this rapidly evolving situation and take appropriate steps to ensure continued operations and protection of public health. The COVID-19 virus has not been detected in drinking water (Source: [U.S. CDC, Water Transmission and COVID-19](#), visited 3/13/20). Conventional water treatment methods that use filtration and disinfection, such as those in most municipal public water systems (*i.e.*, “waterworks”), should remove or inactivate the virus that causes COVID-19.

As a waterworks owner, please consider appropriate actions to monitor the well-being of operators and staff. Waterworks owners should take appropriate steps to ensure continued operations with a focus on treatment efficacy for pathogens. This includes properly operated filtration and/or disinfection practices under the Surface Water Treatment Rule (SWTR) and the Groundwater Rule (GWR). You can learn more about these regulations [here](#).

Consider the following questions and potential action items to self-assess your waterworks:

1. **STAFFING:** *How will we continue to provide an adequate quantity of safe drinking water to customers should our primary operator(s) become sick or subject to quarantine? What alternate operational staff would we rely upon?*

Potential Action Items to Consider:

- Review your Emergency Response and Operations and Maintenance Plans; make sure the plans are up to date.
- Review and update your records for existing personnel, including key duties, essential functions and training/certification records. Update contact information and cell phone numbers as needed.

- Identify any gaps in personnel and assess options for obtaining additional operational staff, such as relocating and training operators from other areas, or seeking additional staff as needed. Consider the benefits of your lead operator conducting training and a water treatment plant walk-through with alternate operators and staff before an emergency staffing limitation occurs.
- Well-written standard operating procedures (SOPs) are a critical tool that can enable a properly certified operator from a neighboring waterworks, or other backup operators to operate, on a temporary basis, your waterworks should your primary operator(s) become unavailable. Consider the following questions:
 - Where are your SOPs? When were they last reviewed and updated by your lead operator(s)?
 - Do the SOPs contain enough detailed information to be used by the alternate operators and staff you plan to rely upon? Who will make decisions regarding who can use these SOPs should your primary operator become unavailable?
 - If your primary operator is quarantined, but well enough to work remotely, do you have a plan in place for them to provide verbal SOPs and guidance to operators and staff who are onsite at the water treatment plant?
- To reduce transmission of illness amongst your existing water treatment plant operators and staff, ensure that your sick leave policies are flexible and consistent with public health guidance and that employees are aware of these policies. More information about these recommendations is available from the VDH at the above link.

2. **ESSENTIAL TREATMENT CHEMICALS AND EQUIPMENT:** *What vendor(s) would we contact should our primary vendor(s) not be able to provide essential chemicals and equipment in a timely manner?*

Potential Action Items to Consider:

- Have you considered that employee absenteeism from other interdependent sectors such as transportation, shipping, industrial equipment, chemical manufacturers and suppliers may limit and/or delay your ability to obtain essential operational supplies?
- Review and assess your inventory of essential treatment chemicals. Do you have up-to-date contact information for an alternate chemical supplier? Verify if this alternate supplier's current product list includes the NSF-approved chemicals that you rely upon.
- Review and assess your inventory of essential water treatment plant equipment (e.g. chemical feed pumps). Are adequate backup chemical feed pumps, rebuild kits, and/or spare parts currently on site?
- If a vendor is unable to provide a critical component for a pump, would a neighboring waterworks have a spare? Consider the benefits of developing mutual aid agreements with other facilities for equipment through Virginia's Water/Wastewater Agency Response Network (VA WARN). Are you a member

of VA WARN? For more information, please access the following link <http://www.vawarn.org/> or call 434.386.3190.

- Check your inventory and expiration dates of sampling consumables (e.g. sampling reagents, bottles, etc.). How long would your current supply of sampling consumables last? Attempt to identify an alternate vendor that may be able to provide specific consumables necessary for compliance monitoring samples.
- Consider ordering additional supplies of treatment chemicals and reagents, keeping in mind the shelf life and expiration dates of existing stock and any additional quantities you purchase.
- Are key staff with purchasing capability available to make purchases during after-hours or weekend emergencies? Has the board/locality provided prior approval for emergency purchases of supplies, chemicals and equipment?

3. **LABORATORY TESTING:** *If our primary water quality-testing laboratory cannot accommodate our samples, what alternate lab would we use?*

Potential Action Items to Consider:

- Similar to item #2 above, have you considered that employee absenteeism or supply chain shortages at your preferred water quality testing laboratory may temporarily limit their ability to process your routine compliance samples?
- Consider identifying an alternate lab to meet your specific water quality sampling needs.
- The Division of Consolidated Laboratory Services (DCLS) maintains an updated list of accredited and certified laboratories. Here is the link to the website with instructions on how to find a laboratory: <https://dgs.virginia.gov/division-of-consolidated-laboratory-services/certification-accreditation/find-a-lab/>

See the “Drinking Water Laboratories with certification detail”

4. **NOTIFICATION:** *If we experience a breakdown in treatment or operations, will we be able to notify ODW and customers in a timely manner?*

Potential Action Items to Consider:

- Waterworks must contact the Office of Drinking Water (ODW, [ODW Contact Information](#)) as soon as possible after discovering circumstances that may affect water quality or quantity. This includes a failure, significant interruption or breakdown in key water treatment processes, or a lack of resources that adversely affect operations, such as staff shortages, notification by the power utility of planned lengthy power outages, or imminent depletion of treatment chemical inventories.

- For any imminent threat (Tier 1) situation, the waterworks must also consult with ODW within 24 hours and issue Tier 1 public notification (PN) within 24 hours.
- Despite your best efforts, a breakdown in treatment may occur. Accurate and timely communication with your customers is paramount, now more so than ever. Is your SOP regarding issuance of PN up to date? If you use an “auto-dialer,” when was the last time you updated customer phone numbers? Do you have PN templates available and ready to be completed? You can find some example PN templates here: [Water Advisories](#) (scroll down and click on the “Water Advisories” button near the center of the page).

Several resources are available to keep you informed:

<http://www.vdh.virginia.gov/surveillance-and-investigation/novel-coronavirus/>

<https://www.wef.org/news-hub/wef-news/the-water-professionals-guide-to-the-2019-novel-coronavirus/> .

<https://www.epa.gov/coronavirus/coronavirus-and-drinking-water-and-wastewater>

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/specific-groups/children-faq.html>

<https://www.who.int/publications-detail/water-sanitation-hygiene-and-waste-management-for-covid-19>

<https://wef.org/coronaviruswebcastfeb20>

https://www.wwdmag.com/contaminants/coronavirus-what-you-need-know?oly_enc_id=7898C9352267G2R