

Coronavirus/COVID-19 Readiness: Sustaining Operations



Water operators are essential personnel and should be prepared to address potential impacts to supply due to personnel interruptions tied to COVID-19. Water systems play a vital role in public health and Minnesota Rural Water Association is here to help systems put measures in place that ensure seamless operations during the Coronavirus/COVID-19 pandemic.

Critical Operations Preparedness

- Identify essential employees required to maintain continuous operation and designate an emergency backup for these employees in the case they cannot report to work.
- Strategize implementation of an ancillary workforce (e.g. neighboring water systems) to operate utilities on emergency basis.
- Stay stocked on chemical supplies and order products ahead of schedule to avoid delays from understaffed chemical suppliers.
- Generate back-up supplier contact list for essential chemical and operation needs.
- Update/create detailed written instructions for crucial operations (i.e. shutdown, water quality sampling, public notification).
- Review/update emergency response plan and contacts. Identify key customers—hospitals or care facilities—with special needs.
- Discuss cyber security precautions when using remote access. Back-up critical files frequently as a prevention measure to restore data.
- Consider emergency food and overnight necessities at 24-hr facilities for personnel working long shifts.
- Encourage personnel to stay home when they are sick. Provide work-from-home or sick leave options. Discuss backup or alternative shift rotations for personnel that need to stay home to care for themselves and/or loved ones.
- Limit meetings, gatherings and travel. Encourage personnel to postpone all non-essential travel to areas affected by COVID-19.

Public water systems are expected to continue to monitor water quality and provide sample results to regulators during the COVID-19 epidemic.

There may be systems that due to an outbreak of COVID-19, require operational assistance. Minnesota Water and Wastewater Agency Response Network (MnWARN) could, and should, be activated; however, it should be stressed there is no guarantee a volunteer will come forward. In the event the State were to experience Pandemic Management Phase, many Minnesota communities would likely see a shortage of personnel to provide essential public services. That said, MnWARN is committed in our Mission of Utilities Helping Utilities, and would reach out to the 400+ MnWARN Members in an attempt to secure any requested resource.

Now is the time municipalities, regardless of size, to update or draft Emergency Operations Plans (EOP's), reach out to our neighboring communities to discuss Continuity of Operations (COOP's), and most importantly, refresh and enforce preventive measures.