Frequently Asked Questions

COVID-19 Planning—Water Treatment Plant Staffing Continuity

3/17/2020

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1. **How can we prepare for potential staff shortages due to the outbreak?**
   - Review or develop mutual aid agreements with neighboring utilities with similar treatment plants. A similar technology is more important than a similar size.
   - Join WAWARN.
   - Cross-train existing staff.
   - Contact former operators with plant-specific knowledge to determine if they could be available in an emergency.
   - Contact operator certification at dwopcert@doh.wa.gov to evaluate eligibility of your existing staff to qualify for the needed level of certification and discuss other alternatives such as temporary certification.
   - Contact local contract operators to assess if they have the required qualifications and availability to help operate your plant. Contract operators are listed at doh.wa.gov/opcert.
   - Prepare alternative sources of supply (groundwater, emergency interties) to be activated if needed.
   - Invest in technology to allow active remote plant monitoring and bolster distance meeting capabilities for on-site personnel.
   - Make sure SOPs for critical activities are written down, up-to-date, and readily available.
   - Evaluate whether operators could be sequestered at the plant, if necessary.

2. **We’re currently having difficulty finding enough staff to operate our water treatment facility. What should we do?**
   - Keep in mind that a qualified shift operator can run the plant when the lead operator is temporarily unavailable.
   - Contact your mutual aid partner(s) to see if they can help.
   - Contact WAWARN if you are a member.
   - As a last resort, contact your local EOC and ask for assistance. The process for doing so is outlined on the Washington Military Department’s Emergency Management Division website at mil.wa.gov/logistics-and-resources. Use the correct form (213RR).
   - Be specific about what you need! Give the type of treatment plant you operate and the plant rating. For example, a 0.5 MGD, level 1 slow sand filtration plant with chlorine disinfection.
   - If you are unable to maintain normal operation due to lack of staffing, contact your DOH regional office to discuss whether a health advisory is needed.

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<tr>
<th>Eastern Region</th>
<th>Northwest Region</th>
<th>Southwest Region</th>
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<td>509-329-2100</td>
<td>253-395-6750</td>
<td>360-236-3030</td>
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3. **We have a knowledgeable staff member who is capable of operating the plant, but doesn’t yet have the certification level needed. Can they apply for temporary certification?**
   - Contact operator certification at dwopcert@doh.wa.gov to discuss options.

4. **We have a local operator certified in another state. Will DOH honor another state’s certification?**
   - Contact operator certification at dwopcert@doh.wa.gov to discuss reciprocity and other options. Often this can be done very quickly.

5. **How can we reduce the risk that our operations staff will become sick?**
   - Make sure all staff understand and follow basic recommendations to protect themselves (handwashing, avoiding touching face, maintaining personal distance).
   - Provide operators with downtime between shifts to ensure they are adequately rested.
   - Have operators self-monitor their temperature and not report to work if elevated.
   - Use disinfecting wipes to clean SCADA stations and other high touch surfaces at every shift change.
   - Prohibit non-essential personnel from entering the facility.
   - Consider holding staff meetings over the telephone rather than in person.
   - Delay or cancel non-critical gatherings of utility staff.
   - Request electronic acknowledgement of receipt for all deliveries to your plant.

6. **How can we reduce workload for existing staff?**
   - Consider strategies to reduce flow rate and flow rate changes through the plant, such as
     - Using alternative sources that have lower staffing needs.
     - Activating emergency interties.
     - Coordinating with large or wholesale customers to minimize rapid changes in demand.
   - Defer non-essential maintenance activities.
   - Delay non-critical tasks or delegate them to other utility staff.
   - Hire a contractor to perform routine equipment maintenance and/or calibration and verification of critical instrumentation (turbidimeters, chlorine analyzers, pH analyzers). Instruct outside contractors to follow all protective measures in place at the plant.