



MISSISSIPPI STATE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

Date: 5/18/2020

To: Officials and Operators of Public Water Systems

From: MS State Department of Health
Bureau of Public Water Supply

Re: COVID-19 Pandemic Update #6, Operational Concerns in the Ongoing response

The Bureau hopes that this message finds you well and that the current situation has not hampered your abilities to provide vital services including safe drinking water. At the Bureau, we appreciate all you do to maintain this important service to your customers. Over the last couple of weeks, we have seen certain segments of the economy resume operation with more to follow. As the “new normal” has begun, your operation and management processes may have changed to ensure that pandemic guidelines are followed for the protection of staff and your customers. As this transition is still underway, I have included some new resources that may prove beneficial to your system. This update also includes items that have previously been presented as helpful reminders.

Restoring Water Quality in Buildings with Low or No Use:

Responding to increasing concerns by the drinking water industry, states and in conjunction with the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has released guidance regarding water quality in buildings/residences with little or no use. It responds to questions about how systems can maintain water quality while buildings/businesses are closed. As we enter this next stage of reopening the economy, the guidance examines what should be done when those buildings/businesses that have been closed reopen. It asks you to consider important questions such as: What impact will the degraded water have on the building and its occupants? Should access to or use of the water be limited or provided in a cautionary phase? Are proactive disinfection or mitigative measures necessary? Water systems that move into this stage may want to consider staggering the startups of buildings with the potential demand of increased flushing beyond normal processes that could occur. The guidance and a supporting checklist are available at:

<https://www.epa.gov/coronavirus/information-maintaining-or-restoring-water-quality-buildings-low-or-no-use>

Security Risk and Resilience Assessments:

As you are aware the Bureau has been requiring the state’s public water supplies to develop and maintain both a Security Vulnerability Analysis (SVA) and an Emergency Response Plan (ERP). The SVA’s were intended to aid the public water systems in determining its vulnerabilities and the mitigating them for the protection of its water system and the customers that it serves. The ERP was to aid systems in developing strategies, resources, plans, and procedures water systems can use to prepare for and respond to various types of incidents. With the passage of the America’s Water Infrastructure Act of 2018 (AWIA), community water systems serving a population greater than 3,300 are to perform a Risk and Resilience Assessment (similar to SVA) to identify vulnerabilities to potential malevolent acts and natural hazards. From that assessment, systems will develop or update

their ERPs that incorporates findings of their risk and resilience assessment. With these statutory changes, public water systems will be required to certify that these assessments and plans have been completed directly to the Environmental Protection Agency. Furthermore, systems will need to recertify these assessments and plans every five years after the initial certification. To aid in completing the Assessments and ERPs, EPA has released new guidance, checklists, and templates to help states and the nation’s water systems. For the Risk and Resilience Assessment:

<https://www.epa.gov/waterresilience/small-system-risk-and-resilience-assessment-checklist>

and here for the Emergency Response Plan:

<https://www.epa.gov/waterutilityresponse/develop-or-update-drinking-water-utility-emergency-response-plan>

With new AWIA requirements to the Safe Drinking Water Act, the updated templates reflect the required minimum standards by which the assessments and plans must meet. Using your existing assessment/plans, the time necessary to update the new templates should be reduced. As the certifications are submitted directly to the EPA, the law set certification deadlines for submission based on system population size and they are as follows:

Population Served	Risk & Resilience Assessment Submission Dates	Emergency Response Plans Submission Dates
≥100,000	March 31, 2020	September 30, 2020
50,000 – 99,999	December 31, 2020	June 30, 2021
3,301-49,999	June 30, 2021	December 31, 2021

One final note, regardless of system size and type, the Bureau will require both a Risk and Resilience Assessment and ERP to be maintained and updated annually. Failure to do so can result in the system receiving a significant deficiency during the sanitary survey.

Cyber Threats on the Rise:

It is sad but with a crisis comes some individuals that are bent on creating problems for people and businesses. These problems can take the form of financial hardship or loss of control of vital systems. With the pandemic creating health problems, we are seeing a rise in cyber threats that are affecting utilities both in financial and technical ways. One example would be receiving an email that by clicking an embedded link, leads to hacking of financial accounts or loss of control of the water supply’s control system. Please be aware that these threats are real and that your system should take steps to protect your networks and accounts that may be vulnerable to attack. A guide has been developed considering best practices for protection. It can be found at:

<https://www.epa.gov/waterriskassessment/water-sector-cybersecurity-brief-states>

Water Sector Help Masks for System Personnel

Recently the Department of Homeland Security and the Environmental Protection Agency have been able to secure cloth masks for the water sector to provide some level of personal protection. Working with the state and through our Rural Water Emergency Assistance Cooperative, we will be providing you an opportunity to obtain cloth masks for your key personnel. In a future notification, we will let you know where the points of distribution of those masks will be. It should be noted that the masks will not be N95 grade masks as those are still reserved for the healthcare providers, but these cloth masks should be able to provide some level of protection for your personnel.

Staffing Shortages:

As the response to the Pandemic continues, your critical workers may have been impacted. The Bureau has been receiving some reports that operations staff at some public water supplies are at

critical levels due to COVID-19 cases. Please be aware that if your operations staff are severely impacted, assistance is available. If you have reached this point, please contact your regional engineer, and the Bureau will work to get you help.

Necessary Supplies to Support Your Water System:

During this time of response to the Pandemic, your utility may encounter situations where vital supplies such as chemicals and distribution materials are difficult to obtain, or availability is limited. As these situations arise please let the Bureau know. We, working with MEMA, may be able to assist your utility in getting vital supplies necessary to properly and safely operate your public water supply.

Sanitary Surveys/Inspections:

As previously mentioned, compliance for your public water system must continue and that includes scheduled sanitary surveys. In the next few weeks depending on working conditions, regional staff will be reaching out to the systems that have sanitary surveys due for the calendar year to comply with the Safe Drinking Water Act's Ground Water Rule. Similar to previous sanitary surveys/inspections, regional staff will be looking at the critical elements of your water system. During these surveys, staff will be following CDC guidelines related to COVID-19 for your protection and theirs. Additionally, systems that are under current compliance plans, consent agreements, or administrative orders will be inspected to ensure that elements of those plans are still being performed.

For other updates visit our website.

MS State Department of Health www.HealthyMS.com
or <http://HealthyMS.com/covid-19>

Bureau of Public Water Supply emergency/after hours (769) 798-4258

Normal business hours 8am-5pm (601) 576-7518