



MISSISSIPPI STATE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

Date: 4/27/2020
To: Officials and Operators of Public Water Systems
From: MS State Department of Health
Bureau of Public Water Supply
Re: COVID-19 Pandemic Update #5, Operational Concerns in the Ongoing response

Communications during the Pandemic:

Last week, the Bureau provided specific information about communications during the Pandemic that could aid you in getting the information that you need faster whether it be sampling results, sample collections, engineering plan review, etc. With the current situation while teleworking, the Bureau is still providing assistance to you albeit with some associated delays. The attached email tree and Regional Engineering map will assist you during this time to continue to obtain the information that you need. If you have questions not addressed in the email tree, the main contact line is still available.

Water System Compliance Requirements Continue:

As an important reminder, compliance with the Safe Drinking Water Act's (SDWA) rules and provisions **has not** been suspended during the COVID-19 Pandemic. All public water supplies are required to continue to perform water quality collection and sampling. The Mississippi Public Health Laboratory has reported that receipt of samples for this period of time to be lower than normal. Sampling schedules have been set to ensure that samples can be collected and analyzed within the limitations of the various SDWA rules. Failure to collect required samples will result in the issuance of violations. Please take the necessary steps to ensure that your system's samples are collected by the appropriate compliance periods. If you have any questions, please contact our office.

Critical Infrastructure Update from the Dept of Homeland Security:

As the response to the Pandemic evolves, guidance evolves to better reinforce the importance of critical infrastructure at the federal, state, and local levels. Recently, the Department of Homeland Security produced Version 3.0: Guidance on Essential Critical Infrastructure Workers. This revised guidance reiterates the importance of critical infrastructure to aid decision makers in understanding what is needed to keep essential functions and services up and running. The latest version provides additional clarity around various positions needed to support essential functions laid out in earlier versions. This revised guidance can be found at:

<https://www.cisa.gov/publication/guidance-essential-critical-infrastructure-workforce>

FEMA has also released a fact sheet that aims at addressing the personal protective equipment (PPE) needs in a non-healthcare setting. The factsheet emphasizes industries (i.e. drinking water utility workers) need PPE to perform their duties and should continue working with suppliers to acquire needed PPE. If availability is limited in your area, your utility may need to reach out to your county's emergency operations center to obtain needed PPE. The factsheet is found at:

<https://www.fema.gov/news-release/2020/04/22/coronavirus-covid-19-pandemic-addressing-ppe-needs-non-healthcare-setting>

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.

Drinking Water Operator and Backflow Assembly Tester Certifications:

As a reminder, Dr. Thomas Dobbs, the State Health Officer, has issued a blanket extension of Licenses/Permits/Certifications for Essential Environmental Health Facilities and Services including the certification of Drinking Water Operators and Backflow Assembly Testers (BPAT). This extension is retroactive back to April 1, 2020. While this extension grants operator and BPAT certified individuals an extended certification period beyond what is outlined in the regulations, individuals should still strive to obtain the necessary CEUs when offered to ensure full compliance with the renewal requirements. See attached extension notification from Dr. Thomas Dobbs.

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, regional staff will be reaching out to the systems that have sanitary surveys due for the fiscal 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