

Subject: ARWA Conference Updates / COVID-19

3/14/2020

Hello Rural Water,

We are close to finalizing new dates for the 42nd Annual Technical Training Conference. We should be able to get that information out to you all early next week once we have details concerning the new room blocks.

We apologize again and hope you all were successful in reorganizing your plans on such short notice. However, we feel this decision was the only appropriate one to make considering the circumstances.

Let's chat for a moment about the circumstances:

There is a lot of fear and uncertainty going around at the moment. We, as community health specialists and critical service providers, must begin to look inward and plan for as many scenarios as possible to ensure we can continue to provide the vital services to our communities during this state of both National and State Emergency.

How about a thought experiment?

Without getting too dark, we won't assume any deaths or the like, let's think about what **your system** would do under the following circumstances:

1. Your operator(s) or someone living with him/her/them contract COVID-19. Don't worry, they all pull through, but are subsequently quarantined for four weeks. Do you have agreements with your neighboring systems or other arrangements in place to keep the plants, wells, wastewater treatment facilities, and other mission-critical infrastructure up and running?
2. The State mandates that no water/sewer service can be disconnected for non-payment. (This is occurring elsewhere in the Nation right now.) Or perhaps you can't send folks out to get meter readings. Are you familiar with your billing process and account management systems in order to flag these accounts and waive any fees and such customarily associated with overdue accounts and make any other necessary account and billing adjustments?

Considering scenario #1, we want to remind you that our Circuit Riders do have some ability to come in and assist during these times, depending on the severity of any local outbreak. Also, your neighbors can often help (and probably already do) with local issues. But, anyone that does not typically operate your system, no matter how well trained and experienced they are, will have many problems if you do not have a current and complete **Standard Operating Procedures (SOP)** manual available for professionals to use in order to make decisions from an operational perspective.

We recommend that you take the next few weeks while things are quiet and still (no basketball or anything else to watch or participate in) and dust off your SOP and other related plans and documents. Update all your contact information for your local emergency planning group. Reach out to them and make sure they have your information. Partnerships and communication will be essential during this time.

For scenario #2, communication efforts will have to be on point. Do not flood the space with many voices saying conflicting messages. Learn who will lead the message and rely upon them to make sure

your team is all on the same page with any statements that are made. Once things return to normal, any special customer considerations you have made will need to be able to be tracked and understood later. Clerks and accountants need to be sharp and on top of everything during this time. Health and safety for customers is the primary concern. Still, once all calms down and we return to regular business, the financial health of the water system will be a top priority. I can't say that customers will have to pay fees and such, this will depend on each situation should they occur. I can say that being able to recognize your losses (to the \$0.01) from an emergency is critical when accessing reimbursements later from FEMA or other such agencies.

So, just make sure that as you make adjustments to regular business practices, or purchase anything out of the ordinary for the sole purpose of an emergency event, that you track those items in a way that can be aggregated into a detailed report later. Your leaders will need this information, and government agencies will need this information if any reimbursements are to occur.

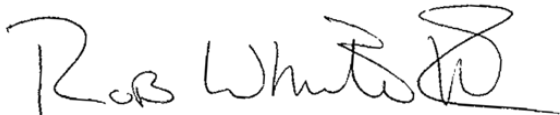
I think that this is enough to consider at present. There are, of course, *many* other potential scenarios that should be considered and addressed, and I encourage each of you to begin to do so if you have not done so already. Add them to your existing Vulnerability Assessments, build them into your SOPs, and communicate them with key personnel in your system.

We would love to know what you all are doing out there that is working for you. Please feel free to reach out to our office and share your successes. We take those stories and ideas and spread them to other utilities that may be struggling to find the solution that you have already perfected.

We will work together to attack this spread of disease by spreading reliable information and best practices to our industry personnel. Together, we will make it through this, and our industry will be better for it.

Thank you all for everything you do.

With my utmost sincerity,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rob White IV". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large, stylized initial "R" and "W".

Rob White IV

ARWA Executive Director