**Considerations in Providing and Accepting Mutual Aid in a Pandemic**

**Work-Related Domestic and International Travel**

Determining whether the organization is in contact with mutual assistance networks to assess the availability of additional resources if there are not enough workers to perform critical work.

* + Could the organization support a request for assistance, and has that status been shared with the mutual assistance networks?

## Supporting the Workforce Operating in Contaminated Areas

Notify the employees who came in contact with the individual.

* Clean and disinfect the area where the individual works and consider options for notifying, monitoring, and potentially quarantining workers who had been in close contact as each situation dictates using CDC guidance:

[https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prepare/disinfecting-building- facility.html](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prepare/disinfecting-building-%20facility.html)

**COVID-19 Access Considerations**

When accessing a restricted area, organizations should consider using vehicles with company logos and advise personnel to carry appropriate company/utility IDs, government-issued IDs, and work orders. Organizations also may consider issuing badges, cards, or letters that identify employees who serve critical functions. They also should work proactively with local authorities to ask that they accept such credentials to grant timely access. These additional credentials could help facilitate access to restricted areas. A credential can reference guidance released by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security to help state and local officials determine the businesses and workers that are essential for sustaining critical infrastructure operations. That guidance can be found online at:(<https://www.epa.gov/coronavirus/coronavirus-and-drinking-water-and-wastewater>) [Water Utility Template: COVID-19 Pandemic (DOCX)](https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2020-04/water_utility_template_covid19.docx)

And on WATER Tracker at:

:[Water\_Utility\_template\_letter\_4-2-2020\_v2](https://www.flwatertracker.com/DocumentLibrary) at (<https://www.flwatertracker.com/DocumentLibrary>)

To maintain adequate staffing levels, organizations should consider:

* Bringing recently retired or separated employees with specialized training back to the organization.
* Training and certifying current employees for some specialized work, in coordination with labor unions, if needed.

**Social Distancing in the Work Environment**

Instituting triple wellness checks with mandatory temperature readings at arrival, at mid- shift, and when going off-duty, with a health survey.

If an employee tests positive for COVID-19, consider:

* Tracing the individual’s steps to determine who that individual worked with in close proximity, as defined by the CDC:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prepare/transmission.html>

* Notify the employees who came in contact with the individual.
* Clean and disinfect the area where the individual works and consider options for notifying, monitoring, and potentially quarantining workers who had been in close contact as each situation dictates using CDC guidance:

[https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prepare/disinfecting-building-](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prepare/disinfecting-building-facility.html) [facility.html](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prepare/disinfecting-building-facility.html)

**Additional Resources**

**Example Q&A for Using a Respirator for COVID-19 Mitigation**

***When do I need to wear a respirator?***

A respirator (N-95 or higher-level) only should be used if you are entering a customer’s premises where there is a confirmed or suspected COVID-19 case, and you cannot maintain 6 ft social distancing.

***How do I get a respirator?***

Contact your supervisor with justification to use a respirator. Your supervisor will arrange to get you a respirator after ensuring that you have been fit tested, medically cleared, and properly trained on the use of the respirator.

***Do I need Medical Clearance and Fit Testing before wearing a respirator?***

Yes, you must complete respirator medical clearance and fit testing within two years before use. Employees must be fit tested to all makes, models, and sizes of the respirator(s) to be used. Unless it has been waived by OSHA, an employee’s medical condition must be evaluated before fit testing.

There are different N95 respirator models that may be in use in the company – you must be fit tested for the model you will be using. (NOTE: Some safety procedures require OSHA-approved training on the use of PPE prior to entering a hazardous environment. A respirator cannot protect an employee if he/she does not know how to use it properly. Check with your company policy and follow any training requirements.)

***What types of respirators are effective against COVID-19?***

Disposable respirators (also known as N95 respirators), half-face respirators, and full-face respirators. All respirators must be NIOSH approved. Class and stock details are provided at the end of this Q&A.

***How do I use an N95 respirator correctly in a COVID-19 situation?***

Follow this N95 Respirator use guidance:

* Use hand hygiene/sanitation when donning and doffing.
* Use a pair of clean latex or nitrile gloves when donning an N95 respirator and performing a user seal check. Employees should understand that beards and other facial hair may reduce the effectiveness of a respirator substantially.
* Discard gloves after donning and making any adjustments to ensure the respirator is sitting comfortably on your face with a good seal.
* Avoid touching the inside of the respirator.
* Inspect the respirator again after cleaning.
* Contact lenses may be worn; however, the employee must have experienced success in wearing contact lenses with a respirator. Consider the environment before doing so

***Can I reuse an N95 respirator?***

Yes. You may reuse an N95 respirator. As with any respirator, inspect it before each use and ensure all components of the respirator are intact, and perform a user seal check. Reuse can be done for up to one shift, as long as the N95 was used as per above guidance. Filtering face piece respirators can be reused by the same worker, but only if the respirator is working properly, its shape remains unchanged, and the filter material is not physically damaged or soiled.

***How do I store and dispose of an N95 respirator?***

A: Store respirators in a bag labeled with your name. Dispose of the storage bag after each use. Discard spent gloves, respirators, and storage bags as regular trash.

***Can I use half-face and full-face respirators instead of N95 respirators?***

Yes. If N95 respirator supplies are low, you can use half- or full-face respirators with P100 magenta cartridges, which will provide adequate protection. Follow all donning and doffing, hand hygiene, storage, and disposal procedures described above. Half- and full-face respirators may be reused if they pass the pre-use inspection.

***What cleaning instructions apply to half- and full-face respirators?***

Half- and full-face respirators must be cleaned using an approved towelette or cleaning solution after each use. Wipe down all surfaces of the respirator, including the cartridges.

***What do I do if my respirator is damaged?***

Do not use any damaged equipment. Discard all damaged respirators and components and request a new one from your supervisor.

**Mutual Assistance for Control Center Operators**

Continuity of control center operations is driven by the health and availability of trained personnel. This has led many organizations to develop and activate plans that involve isolation or sequestration of control center operators to maintain shift integrity and to limit the potential exposure to COVID-19. However, given the shortage of available testing for mission-essential employees, circumstances may arise in which isolation or sequestration fails to protect workforces adequately and additional actions are needed to supplement control center operations.

Mutual assistance or mutual aid is a model that the industry uses very effectively to supplement an impacted organization’s workforce during emergencies like severe weather events, and this model may be adapted to help fill control center gaps during a pandemic. However, there are many challenges and constraints around using mutual assistance in these circumstances, and careful consideration is needed to mitigate the risks associated with sending employees to other service territories.

*Specific guidance for traditional mutual assistance during this pandemic can be found in the “Mutual Assistance Considerations” portion of this Resource Guide.*

**Challenges**:

**Task Variance:** Specific positions and functions within control centers vary greatly and reflect variations in organization- specific policies and alignment. A robust up-front screening is necessary to determine whether the training and certification of potential mutual assistance resources are functionally compatible with the requirements of the requesting entity.

**Knowledge of Operational Practice:** Water and Wastewater Operators, Field Maintenance, Equipment Operators and other related positions all have specific, coordinated responsibilities, and orders of operation used to run their systems. Including the dispatch of personnel, contingency analysis, and system maintenance activity. Additionally, an operator’s knowledge of drinking water or wastewater systems (location of infrastructure, demand response resources, what type of remedial action schemes are available, etc.) is important for efficient operation. Regional variance, including variance inherent in the water and wastewater treatment technologies, should be considered when identifying potential mutual assistance resources to limit the time and complexity of acclimation to a new control center environment.

**System Customization:** Supervisor Control and Data Acquisition (SCADA)) and supporting toolsets are heavily customized, making it difficult to find replacement operators with the required knowledge of Information Technology (IT) and Operations Technology (OT) systems specific to the requesting entity.

**Contamination Risk:** Given the emphasis on staff isolation and sequestration to prevent the spread of COVID-19 to control center personnel, special consideration should be given to the availability of medical testing prior to integrating anyone from outside the organization into a critical workforce. Strict requirements and screening criteria for any external candidates are necessary to limit the risk of contamination. Consideration also should be given to state restrictions on movement and self-quarantine.

**Legal Indemnification**: The risk of potential impacts on the real-time performance of a system is greater for control room operations than it is for the field work mutual assistance crews. Additionally, operators often are accessing and utilizing Critical Infrastructure Protected (CIP) systems, requiring a fast track for system access. The Cyber Mutual Assistance (CMA) Mutual Non- Disclosure and Use of Information Agreement is useful as a template for future agreements for specialized personnel to limit some legal liability and security risks.

**Mutual Assistance Considerations**

The guidance in this document was collected from organizations across the industry. The intent is to serve as a general information resource and not to set any industry standards. This document is evergreen and will be updated regularly to reflect additional or revised guidance as it is received.

**Pandemic Mutual Assistance Checklist**

This checklist is designed to provide requesting and responding guidance on how to conduct mutual assistance during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Utilities are committed to protecting the people working for them and to ensuring operations and infrastructure are supported throughout an emergency. The items in this checklist can help provide guidance for mutual assistance efforts while protecting the health and safety of employees, customers, and communities. These practices are suggested for all organizations, regardless of the number of confirmed COVID-19 cases in the area.

This checklist may be used when providing mutual assistance for outage incidents during the COVID- 19 pandemic. It also may be used when providing mutual assistance if a requesting organization is so impacted by COVID-19 cases that it is not able to conduct normal daily operations without assistance.

Organizations providing or requesting mutual assistance should follow the terms and conditions of their existing mutual assistance or mutual aid agreements.

**Work Practices**

* Responding crews should follow their organization’s policies and procedures, utilities should work to minimize the chance of infected workers travelling. A responding organization may wish to use the COVID-19 Questionnaire with their employees before sending them to the requesting organization. [(See COVID-19 Mutual Assistance Questionnaire)](#_bookmark4)
* Requesting organizations should minimize movement of crews to different regions in their territory. By assigning the same crews to the same work areas, cross pollination and potential exposures are limited. Note, this may require organizations to need additional resources and could impact restoration times.
* Utilities should consider moving toward more isolated and self-contained responding teams to limit the exposure between crews who work for the requesting organization and responding crews. Keep crew teams intact to minimize exposure and execute “transfer of control” best practices for restoration when possible to limit exposure between crews of the requesting organization and responding crews.
* When information is available, requesting organizations should avoid sending responding crews into areas or facilities with significant COVID-19 outbreaks. The requesting company should restore in those areas.
* When information is available, the requesting organization should provide full situational awareness of the COVID-19 impact, the number of cases in the community (or region), and what protective measures are in place to responding crews and their organization, with regular updates.
* Requesting organizations should clarify how long they expect responding crews to be in their area.
* Requesting organizations should identify a liaison who can work with each responding entity to provide information about local conditions. Consider providing this information in advance of receiving responding crews.
* Requesting organizations should try to minimize person-to-person contact for material distribution and use drop points.
* Requesting organizations should use technology for onboarding and briefings (e.g., online conferencing services, conference calls) or conduct briefings in the field to reduce large meetings. Have safety onboarding on videos that can be distributed to crews in advance, with conference calls for Q&A. Conduct daily briefings remotely where feasible.
* If practicable, extensive pre-staging should be avoided unless the threat is imminent. Pre-staging should follow social distancing practices.
* Requesting organizations should look for opportunities within the restoration process to execute the function remotely (dispatching functions, assessment, etc.).
* Both requesting and responding organizations may want to consider screening of crews using non- contact thermometers before deployment and upon arrival to verify employees do not have fevers above 100.4 F.
* Organizations should encourage workers to report to supervisors situations where social distancing cannot be maintained so ways to mitigate can be explored.
* Work orders may be issued using electronic tickets and were supported by decentralized planners. Some organizations assigned staging sites and work orders at lodging locations.

**General COVID-19 Safety Practices**

* If you are sick or have any flu-/virus-like symptoms, report this immediately to your supervisor and consult your physician.
* Cover your coughs and sneezes with a tissue, then immediately throw the tissue in the trash.
* Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after going to the bathroom; before eating; and after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing.
* Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
* Regularly clean your phones and handheld devices as these are some of the dirtiest items we carry.
* Maintain social distancing whenever possible [six (6) feet distance from anyone coughing or sneezing]. Avoid shaking hands and touching others.
* Use “non-circulating mode” for vehicle air conditioning/heating/ventilation.

**Staging Sites**

* Instead of large staging sites, requesting organizations should consider having multiple, smaller staging sites to limit contact with/exposure to crews. Design smaller staging sites to allow CDC distancing recommendations to be followed (currently 6 feet of distancing at all times). Note: this may require organizations to request more self-sufficient resources, such as crews from utilities, rather than contractors.
* Cleaning supplies, hand sanitizer, sanitation supplies, etc. should be available for all crews located at staging areas.

**Lodging, Meals and Support Services**

Requesting organizations should establish lodging and dining sites where social distancing can be established, and the requesting organization can manage and control access and direct sanitation.

* This can include appropriately sized sleeper trailers, tents, renting out entire hotels/motels, or nontraditional spaces for crew-only use.
* Keep crews that are working together in the same lodging and dining facilities. However, consider ways to maximize social distancing, such as limiting rooms to one per person, keeping different organizations on different floors, minimizing servicing of rooms, and having pickup locations for linens and room supplies.
* Consider working with local authorities to develop exemptions from emergency closure and/or stay-at-home orders for hotels or other lodging facilities and their staff so they can serve mutual assistance crews.
* Have a plan for feeding crews in the event restaurants are closed by government order.
* Cleaning supplies, hand sanitizer, sanitation supplies, etc. should be available for all crews located at all lodging and meals areas.
* Provide laundry service, if needed.
* Minimize travel in large vehicles such as buses by having crews use trucks for transportation between lodging and work sites.
* Have vehicles cleaned following CDC guidelines. [(See CDC recommendations.)](#_bookmark3)
* Try to minimize exposure by providing box lunches, snacks, water, etc.
* Utilities should check with hotel operators to confirm preferred hotels will remain open for mutual assistance crews. If hotels currently are closed, verify the length of time necessary for operators to reopen hotels, which could delay access to lodging.
* Organizations should consider using boxed meals to facilitate social distancing to avoid problems with restaurant closures. For future large-scale events, consider food trucks and caterers who can provide boxed meals.
* The number and storage capacity of meal delivery vehicles should be increased in order to deliver boxed meals, food storage containers, and coolers.
* Portable bathrooms may be required in areas where public facilities are closed, especially in non-urban areas.

**External Outreach and Communication**

Requesting organizations should proactively communicate to regulators and government partners that water restoration and recovery may be slower due to the new response regime. Establish and disseminate information to customers that travel and restoration times may be longer.

* Requesting organizations should proactively communicate with customers about social distancing efforts. Ensure responding crews have consistent messaging and practices.
* Requesting organizations should work with local and state officials to ensure responding crews are designated as critical workers and are able to travel to and through the requesting entity’s service territory. Travel documents and authorizations from requesting organizations should be as specific and clear as possible.

**Health Issues**

Requesting organizations and responding crews should utilize the COVID-19 Visitor Questionnaire to evaluate health risks. [(See COVID-19 Mutual Assistance Questionnaire.)](#_bookmark4)

* Workers’ temperatures should be taken daily. If a worker has a temperature above 100.4 F, he/she should be removed from the workforce. The requesting organizations should coordinate with the employees’ organization and follow CDC guidelines on what to do if you are sick. [(See CDC recommendations.)](#_bookmark3)
* Assure that Operators have adequate touch-free thermometers and safety masks
* Workers who become ill should follow CDC guidelines. [(See CDC recommendations.)](#_bookmark3)
* Workers should minimize the use of currency and use credit cards instead to avoid hand-to-hand contact.
* Follow CDC recommendations for when individuals infected with COVID-19 can discontinue home isolation and return to work. [(See CDC recommendations.)](#_bookmark3)
* Follow CDC recommendations on implementing safety practices for critical infrastructure workers who may have had exposure to a person with suspected or confirmed COVID-19. [(See CDC recommendations.)](#_bookmark3)
* Before sending crews for mutual assistance, consider how your organization would quarantine workers after deployment if they are exposed during the mutual assistance work or how you would comply with local and/or state requirements.

**COVID-19 Mutual Assistance Questionnaire**

The health and well-being of employees, strategic partners, families, and visitors remains our industry’s top priority. To prevent the spread of COVID-19 and to reduce the potential risk of exposure to our workforce, contractors, and visitors, we are requesting mutual assistance workers fill out a simple screening questionnaire. The participation of the screening questionnaire is required for all visitors/contractors who are expected onsite and for employees who are responding to a mutual assistance request utility.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Visitor’s Name: | Personal Phone Number (mobile/home): |
| Visitor’s Organization: | Name of Requesting Organization Sponsor: |
| Facility Name: | |
| **SELF-DECLARATION BY VISITOR** | |
| Have you returned from any of the countries listed by the CDC as a travel/health advisory warning for Covid-19 Level 3 or higher in the last 14 days? Current list can be found here: <https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/notices>  □ Yes □ No | |
| Have you returned from any of the states listed in the CDC domestic travel advisory within the last 14 days? Current list can be found here: https://[www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/map-and-travel-notices.html](http://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/map-and-travel-notices.html)  □ Yes □ No | |
| Have you had close contact with or cared for someone diagnosed with COVID-19 within the last 14 days?  □ Yes □ No | |
| Have you been in close contact with anyone who has traveled within the last 14 days to one of the countries listed as a level 3 or higher travel/health advisory by the CDC for Covid-19?  □ Yes □ No | |
| Have you been in close contact with anyone who has traveled within the last 14 days to one of the states listed in the domestic travel advisory by the CDC for Covid-19?  □ Yes □ No | |
| Have you experienced any cold or flu-like symptoms in the last 14 days (to include fever of 100.4 degrees F or higher, dry cough, difficulty breathing, or shortness of breath)?  □ Yes □ No | |

Have you or any member of your household traveled within the last 14 days?

□ Yes □ No

Please report any air travel, cruise ship travel, and/or destinations visited within the last 14 days, both work- related and personal travel.

If you answer “yes” to any of the questions above, access to the facility will be denied.

Signature (Visitor): Date:

**Note:** If you plan to be on requesting organization’s property for consecutive days and your response to this self-declaration changes, please notify your requesting organization sponsor immediately.

***Please complete and return this form electronically to: POC***

ACCESS TO FACILITY (circle one): APPROVED DENIED