

Richmond Water and Wastewater Operations Plan During the COVID-19 Health Crisis

As of 3/12/20

Can we keep operating during the COVID-19 pandemic? What if travel is curtailed? Your most experienced clean water specialists have planned to deal successfully with the coronavirus outbreak. We hit the ground running weeks ago to prepare.

We know what to do in almost any kind of adverse circumstances we face.

Here is our current plan to help us improve our readiness to deal with coronavirus. It's not a complete plan, but it is the beginning of a great start to address the challenges we may face.

First and most importantly, we have a list of all our employees. Our operations team provides you with the critical mixture of skills required to operate the plant 24/7 as necessary. We also maintain contact information for board members, the town manager, police, fire and critical suppliers. Our small plant size and efficient set-up mean that 1-2 employees can maintain basic normal operations provided the required license holder is supervising, either on site or via SCADA. We can run some aspects remotely, but a licensed specialist is required to be on hand at the facility for the bulk of hours to maintain operations. SCADA is extremely reliable. We have battery backups and programming, but could also do adequate levels of treatment manually should it fail in a pinch. We make sure all licensed specialists are capable of running critical systems.

Richmond has a combined water and wastewater department and requires specialists to be skilled in all aspects of the multi-responsibility system. We cross-train regularly in the department. We have adequate supplies of chlorine, polymers, sodium aluminate and other critical treatment consumables on hand at all times. We have stocked up and topped off as many of these as is feasible. If a general quarantine is declared, we can still get the job done. The limit of time on a general quarantine is sludge storage capacity at the plant. However, Richmond partners with CSWD under a contract and is subject to their decisions and support on waste transport.

We are fenced and gated and locked at our facilities. It will be critical to make sure operators are exempt from travel restrictions and can get to these facilities at all times. Should travel restrictions require personnel at the plant, we have the ability to do so. We maintain a supply of dry goods on site at all times and have food contingencies in place provided there is some warning provided. As it has not been budgeted for by the town, we do not have the supplies for sleeping quarters or town purchased emergency rations. In a quarantine, the best approach to maintain operations would be providing specialists with exemption credentials to allow them travel between work and home for the most effective operations.

Richmond specialists also have an extensive mutual aid web of consultants, contractors, past employees and other experts available at all times in our network of support. Like most small

systems, we rely upon these invaluable compatriots for high expertise repair, maintenance and advice. Workarounds have been planned to mobilize the appropriate personnel from the network should systems be beyond repair by the available staff specialists.

We are well stocked with batteries, chargers for cell phones and radios, spare parts and a plethora of other wearable parts and repair supplies. We have a fully stocked first-aid kit for staff as well as local contacts and a supply of any needed medications for individuals that need them.

In addition to your regular operations staff and network, we also have access to utility personnel down the road and across the state. The Town of Hinesburg is our first-line back-up, along with other towns that employ several previous Richmond specialists who might step in for current staff should the need arise. Clean water specialists are not easily replaced. Each system is uniquely developed and maintained with procedures specific to the system. Unfortunately, your facility staff cannot simply turn to other town employees for back-up except in very limited circumstances. We are the technical specialists that keep the water on and the wastes treated.

This is what we have done to prepare so far, but there are still some loose ends. Specialists need to be able to get to the facilities and move freely in the system to address failures in any/all situations, at any and all times, with any and all emergency contractors needed. We require credentials to do this. Even in a quarantine, if the water stops flowing and the wastes aren't treated, public health is put at risk.

We expect this pandemic to be constantly variable. One of the pillars of emergency management is maintaining operations of vital public utilities like water supply and wastewater treatment.