



Cliff # 1161027

Date: April 9, 2020

To: Drinking Water Systems Owners; Regional Health Authorities; and Environmental Operators Certification Program

Re: **Temporary Measures to Ensure Continuity of Operations for Water Systems in British Columbia under the *Drinking Water Protection Act***

As the COVID-19 outbreak continues to evolve locally and globally, the health and well-being of the people of British Columbia is our government's number one priority.

Under British Columbia's *Drinking Water Protection Act*, operations for drinking water systems to provide clean, safe drinking water to the public is considered an essential service.

During the current Public Health Emergency and Provincial State of Emergency declarations, the Provincial Health Officer supports the following temporary measures, where reasonable, to ensure continuity of operations for drinking water system owners who may experience staffing challenges as a result of the outbreak:

- Flexibility to redeploy and employ qualified Operators as needed to address staff shortages, reschedule Operator hours, and use Operators whose certification may have expired within the past 3 years. System owners should consult their Direct Responsible Charge plan when selecting Operators from within their organization. The expectation is that system owners and health authorities engage with their employees and unions (where applicable) to identify options that may work for all parties involved when scheduling adjustments and/or deployment are needed.
- Temporarily employ certain other qualified individuals to perform operational duties, if needed. These individuals include knowledgeable technical personnel and supervisors, managers, professional engineers, technologists, and Operators.
- For any Level I to IV water systems that require Environmental Operators Certification Program (EOCP) certified Operators, the EOCP's **Operator Peer Network** program may be able to provide a source of appropriately certified Operators. For further information, please contact Kalpna Solanki at ksolanki@eocp.ca; 604.874.4784 x221; or 778.688.9196.

2/...

- Small water systems that do not require EOCP certification (unless specified in conditions on their permit) may seek to train others in the basic operation of systems to assist in case the person running the system is unavailable.

Drinking water system owners are further advised to:

- Update emergency response plans (ERPs) and review staffing coverage procedures to plan for staff absences due to illness or isolation as it is important that those experiencing symptoms (fever, sore throat, coughing, sneezing, diarrhea) of COVID-19 or other communicable disease do not come to the workplace. System owners should share the updated ERPs with their Drinking Water Officer and should notify them of any major disruptions.
- Consider mutual aid agreements with neighbouring suppliers, where possible, to ensure that drinking water services are maintained.
- Identify priority actions to be taken in the event of a reduced workforce and create operations teams that provide a critical mixture of skills required to operate the water system continuously and without interruption.
- Ensure written standard operating procedures are detailed and easy to follow for junior staff to carry out duties not normally assigned to them, if needed.
- Consider postponing new non-critical projects to ensure tasks essential to delivering potable water can be carried out if staff resources are a potential issue.

General precautions for employers with respect to physical distancing, hygiene and employee illness all apply to water systems. For the most up-to-date information please consult: <http://www.bccdc.ca/health-info/diseases-conditions/covid-19/employers-businesses>

Sincerely,



Bonnie Henry
MD, MPH, FRCPC
Provincial Health Officer

Cc Joanne Edwards, Provincial Drinking Water Officer