

**WPCA  
COVID-19  
Contingency Plan (2020)**



**TOWN OF MONTVILLE**  
*WATER POLLUTION CONTROL AUTHORITY*  
83 PINK ROW  
UNCASVILLE, CT 06382

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**March 2020**

Mission Statement: *To serve the public, to protect the environment and to maintain a reputation for quality and value in water and wastewater management within the Town of Montville.*

Together, we are facing a truly unprecedented situation, affecting every aspect of our lives including our work to supply water and sewerage to the Town of Montville. In the face of this epidemic, we remain steadfastly committed to this mission. Society does not function without access to clean water, without safe sanitation services to remove waste and contaminants, and without operational water treatment plants and operational water infrastructure. What we do here, each day, is empower water experts – our water and wastewater operators who rely on a unique skill set to provide these basic needs for society as a whole.

## **INTRODUCTION**

The Town of Montville (the Town) Water Pollution Control Authority (WPCA) is provided this *Contingency Plan* to protect human health and the environment during the outbreak of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19).

The Superintendent has been monitoring information provided by the State as well as professional organizations regarding the coronavirus and how to protect the workforce. OSHA reports that current disinfection techniques will prove adequate to prevent transmission. Training and information exchanges are performed daily. Additional control measures were made based on a review of WPCF's *Facilities Plan* (URS, 2011) and *Emergency Action Plan* (GreenCorp, 2019) as well as the *Water Supply Plan including the Water Conservation Plan and the Emergency Contingency Plan* (Milone & MacBroom, 2015).

Currently, the COVID-19 virus has NOT been detected in drinking water, and there is no evidence that the virus can be spread to humans through water. The risk of transmission from the feces of an infected person is also unknown, but is expected to be low based on previous outbreaks of related coronaviruses.

It is the intention of the Town to comply fully and in a prudent manner with all occupational safety and health standards and regulations. Consequently, this program is to comply with the Department of Labor, Occupational Safety and Health Administration's *Employee Emergency Action Plan Standard*.

The program aims to provide direction to staff about existing operations at the Water Pollution Control Facility (WPCF) and the Water Supply (WS). The health and safety of our employees and ratepayers is the priority. Information about the COVID-19 virus was posted to the WPCA website.

This two-phase contingency plan addresses the potential virus exposure and/or disruption or otherwise potential delays in scheduled work and/or delivery of goods and services.

## Novel Coronavirus

On January 30, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the outbreak of the COVID-19 to be a public health emergency of international concern. Coronaviruses are a family of viruses that includes the common cold and flu. Coronavirus is highly infectious and therefore a serious threat to business as usual.

The Governor placed the State in a *State of Emergency* related to the above-referenced illness on March 11. Subsequently, the Mayor placed the Town in a local civil preparedness emergency.

## Concerns

Scientists have had little time to study the virus for testing and/or response. The best current data are estimates. Working figures seem to be

- The incubation period between becoming infected and showing any symptoms is thought to be 2-14 days.
- The virus appears to be highly contagious, based upon the number of people who have become infected and the speed at which new cases have appeared.
- The death rate is believed to be around 2%, although the current death rate from known infections globally is 3.5%.
- Many people will not even realize they are infected because their symptoms will be very mild. As a result, the actual number of infected people may be far higher than published.

As a result, an employee at work who has COVID-19 is certain to infect other people.

## Initial Response

To prepare for the coronavirus business contingency plan, the team was gathered to brainstorm to identify the areas of the WPCF or WS to be likely affected. It's more than just staff and health. Initial conversations revolved around the following:

- What exactly is the risk?
- What is the plan for that risk?
- What immediate actions are necessary?
- What to do if there is a significant staff reduction?
- What if 50% of ratepayer businesses are closed for three weeks?
- What if customers can't pay their bills for 14 days?
- How is the WS affected?
- How is the WPCF affected?

## Plan

The plan in summary consists of:

### Step 1

- Enhanced cleaning of operational spaces and bathrooms (twice per day)
- Education about the virus/symptoms
- Education about appropriate hygiene and engineering controls to limit exposure
- Controls to limit staff interaction (i.e., segregation of key personnel)
- Mutual aid discussions with neighboring Towns and Casino for staffing/equipment needs
- Cross-training in the event of key personnel absences
- Confirmation of remote WPCF/WS control access (via SCADA)
- Use of video/phone conferencing
- Monitor travel restrictions within the State
- Over-purchases of key materials like polymer, chlorine, personal hygiene and cleaning supplies
- Confirmation of subcontractors (i.e., laboratory, engineers, consultants) availability
- Confirmation that in-house laundry equipment is operational
- Review of existing budgets with consideration to billing and expenses

### Step 2

- Enhanced health monitoring of the team (i.e. beginning of each shift) and crew segregation.
- Re-assessment of work hours and staffing

To limit exposure, no interaction is permitted with the general permit and for staff within six feet of separation. Employees have been advised to stay home if experiencing cold or flu-like symptoms.

## **STEP 1 RESPONSES**

It is important to have employees familiar with the potential threat, and that are healthy enough to work. This means if somebody attending work while clearly unwell, they should be sent home. This will avoid spreading the illness. Additionally, face to face meetings will be discontinued with use of online services or conference calls. If an employee has flu-like symptoms (i.e., fever, cough, congestion, shortness of breath) and has been in close contact with a person known to have COVID-19 or if you have recently traveled from an area with community spread of COVID-19, they will be directed to call their healthcare professional.

In addition, the Superintendent has provided to the staff a selected compilation of coronavirus resources to promote our health and continued operations:

- The CDC's guidelines for law enforcement and first responders who may come in contact with the coronavirus
- Recommendations for preventing exposure to COVID-19 in non-healthcare workplaces (also published by the CDC)
- The CDC's plain-language recommendations for stopping coronavirus spread
- OSHA's information on hazard recognition and preventing worker exposure to COVID-19

A review of staffing in lieu of absences (i.e. cross-training, mutual aid) has been completed.

Technology has been reviewed and specifically implemented to limit interaction with persons outside the plant as well as for remote process monitoring/control and remote meeting options. No travel bans have been enforced.

Suppliers are rationing bulk chemicals as well as daily hygiene products (i.e. hand gel, toilet paper rolls). Over-buying was begun several weeks ago in anticipation of hoarding.

The WPCA has sufficient funds to operate the Enterprise Fund although it's critical to establish credit control to bring late-paying customers up to date before the worst. The WPCA is trying to avoid unpaid invoices.

## **STEP 2 RESPONSES**

Daily meetings encourage self-monitoring to determine if staff are unwell and what to do about it.

It is likely that the WPCF and WS will experience staff absences due to some self-isolating for 2-week periods and thus unable to operate at normal capacity.

Consideration has been made on how to maintain sewer and water services if any member of staff is absent. MTUA operators are familiar with the Town's water supply sampling schedule. It was recommended to consider 25%, 50% and 75% reductions in staff.

## **RISK MANAGEMENT**

The worst case scenario would include a limited interruption in water service only. Contingency plans are already in place via the *Intra-Regional Water Supply Response Plan* and the *Emergency Response Plan*.

As is the case in past with natural disasters, the wastewater treatment plant and collection system are expected to operate in the best manner possible to meet state and federal guidelines. The operation of the collection system is not expected to fail. Adequate staffing

(and on-call personnel) will respond, if required. Chemical addition will be required (i.e. nutrients, polymer) to ensure effluent quality is maintained.

Every effort will be made to ensure the minimum impact upon customers and protect public health and the environment during this crisis and in the long term. The WPCA will communicate this and other virus related information to customers.

There exists a sufficient safety net in terms of cash availability for the WPCA to be resilient and successful.