March 19, 2020

From: Sue Houghton, CEO

To: Our Valued System & Associate Members

Re: COVID– 19 Virus

The Board of Directors and the CEO of the Maryland Rural Water Association continue to monitor the day to day changes regarding the COVID-19 virus and its potential impacts on the trainings and services we provide to and for our members. While we do not wish to make any rash decisions, we are aware of your concerns for health, safety, finances, and scheduling. Our first and primary concern will always be the health and safety of our staff and members.

*Please note that on March 16, 2020, Governor Hogan issued an emergency order banning all utility shutoffs thereby prohibiting all water service provider companies from shutting off any residential customer’s service or charging any residential late fees.

We’d like to provide you with some updates:

Field Operations:

Please be advised that MRWA continues to monitor the issues surrounding the COVID-19 virus and its implications for our members. This association is fully staffed and is positioned to continue uninterrupted operations. We have received confirmation that in an effort to reduce exposure, all federal and state technical assistance programs have been modified to allow for the implementation of “remote assistance”, except in the cases of emergency. If your water or wastewater system has an emergency, our field staff will respond immediately and assist you by every means possible. In other cases, they may reach out to you remotely to assist with needs assessments, CCR’s, ERP’s, Risk & Resilience Assessments, troubleshooting via photo or video, and with staffing plans for the remainder of this incident, just to name a few of the services available. Again, if an emergency exists, our staff will respond without hesitation!

Traditional and Water Sampler Training Classes:

MRWA has postponed all training sessions in order to comply with state social distancing policies until further notice. We will begin rescheduling classes as soon as we are allowed to do so. Please be sure to check our website frequently as all training information will be updated as soon as possible.

Continuity of Operations & Critical Preparedness:

Water & Wastewater Operators are essential personnel and should be prepared to address potential impacts to supply, flow and treatment due to personnel interruptions tied to COVID-19. MRWA staff are here to assist you in maintaining your preparedness level.
Critical Operations Preparedness:

- Identify essential employees required to maintain continuous operation and designate an emergency backup for these employees in the case they cannot report to work.
- Strategize implementation of an ancillary workforce (e.g. neighboring water systems, contractors, employees in other job titles/descriptions, retirees) to operate utilities on emergency basis.
- Stay stocked on chemical supplies and order products ahead of schedule to avoid delays from understaffed chemical suppliers.
- Generate back-up supplier contact list for essential chemical and operation needs.
- Update/create detailed written instructions for crucial operations (i.e. shutdown, sampling, public notification).
- Review/update emergency response plan and contacts. Identify key customers—hospitals or care facilities—with special needs.
- Discuss cybersecurity precautions when using remote access. Back-up critical files frequently as a prevention measure to restore data.
- Consider emergency food and overnight necessities at 24-hr facilities for personnel working long shifts.
- Encourage personnel to stay home when they are sick.
- Discuss backup or alternative shift rotations for personnel that need to stay home to care for themselves and/or loved ones.
- If possible, make a plan with your family and any groups that you lead in case of school/work closures.
- Limit meetings, gatherings and travel. Encourage personnel to postpone all non-essential travel to areas affected by COVID-19.

There may be systems that require operational assistance due to an outbreak of COVID-19. The MRWA is compiling a pool of certified water and wastewater operators who might be available to provide emergency on-site assistance to other systems. You do not need to be a member and we encourage you to participate with this effort. Contact Donna Dunlap at donna.dunlap@md-rwa.org to provide your information. We will need to following information:

- Name
- Cell phone number
- Email
- Grade level license (please detail water or wastewater with your grade level)
- Certification number
- Area of expertise (if applicable)
- County of residence
- Area of residence

We sincerely thank you in advance for those willing to offer your services!

So that’s where we are right now. As for the future, we are continuing to monitor the situation and we will fully comply with any orders released by the State of Maryland or the federal government. Again, our first concern will always be the health and safety of our staff and members. This is really uncharted territory for all of us and we ask for your consideration as we navigate through the factual information and potential impacts with the intention to make the best decisions possible.