



# Emergency Planning—Water Treatment Plant Staffing Continuity

## Frequently Asked Questions

### 1. How can we get ready for a likely staff shortage due to an emergency?

- Make sure Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) for critical activities are written down, up-to-date, and easily available. Have process flow schematics that show monitoring locations.
- Review or develop mutual aid agreements with neighboring utilities with similar treatment plants. A similar technology is more important than a similar size.
- Join [WAWARN](#).
- Cross-train existing staff.
- Contact past operators with plant-specific knowledge to decide if they could be a backup in an emergency.
- Contact operator certification at [dwopecert@doh.wa.gov](mailto:dwopecert@doh.wa.gov) to assess ability of your staff to meet the needed level of certification. Discuss other options such as temporary certification.
- Contact local contract operators to assess if they have the required qualifications and time to help operate your plant. Contract operators are listed at [doh.wa.gov/opcert](http://doh.wa.gov/opcert).
- Prepare other sources of supply (groundwater, emergency interties) to activate if needed.
- Invest in technology to allow active remote plant monitoring and support distance meeting capacity for on-site workers.
- Assess if operators could shelter in place at the plant, if necessary.

### 2. How can we prepare our facility to be operated by an outside operator?

- If you have a mutual aid agreement with another utility or have found a backup operator, invite them to your plant for orientation and training.
- Locate critical SOP in visible and easily reached location.
- If not already labeled, mark key facilities with blue painter's tape or similar. Label chemical injection piping, water quality monitoring locations, manually operated valves, chemical feed tanks and feed pumps. Make labels consistent with process flow schematics in SOP.
- Identify steps for the outside operator to safely and legally get physical access to facilities.
- Identify communication tools to allow a sick operator to remotely help the outside operator to know and carry out SOP.

### 3. What should we do if we're having trouble finding enough staff to operate our water treatment facility?

- A qualified shift operator can run the plant when the lead operator is temporarily absent.
- Contact your mutual aid partner(s) to see if they can help.
- Contact WAWARN if you are a member.

- As a last resort, contact your local EOC and ask for help. The process for doing this is on the Washington Military Department's Emergency Management Division website at [mil.wa.gov/logistics-and-resources](http://mil.wa.gov/logistics-and-resources). Use the correct form (213RR).
- Be exact about what you need! Give the type of treatment plant you operate and the plant rating. For example, a 0.5 MGD, level 1 slow sand filtration plant with chlorine disinfection.
- If you are not able to maintain normal operation due to lack of staffing, call your DOH regional office to discuss if a health advisory is needed.

Eastern Region	Northwest Region	Southwest Region
509-329-2100	253-395-6750	360-236-3030

**4. We have a staff member who is able to operate the plant, but does not have the certification level needed. Can they apply for temporary certification?**

- Contact operator certification at [dwopcert@doh.wa.gov](mailto:dwopcert@doh.wa.gov) to discuss options.

**5. We have a local operator certified in another state. Will DOH honor another state's certification?**

- Contact operator certification at [dwopcert@doh.wa.gov](mailto:dwopcert@doh.wa.gov) to discuss reciprocity and other options. Often this can be done very quickly.

**6. How can we reduce the risk that our operations staff will become sick?**

- Make sure all staff know and follow [basic recommendations](#) to protect themselves (wash hands, do not touch face, keep 6 feet of distance between each other).
- Provide operators with downtime between shifts to make sure they are rested.
- Operators should monitor their temperature and not report to work if they have a fever.
- Use cleaning wipes to clean SCADA stations and other high touch areas at every shift change.
- Ban nonessential workers from entering the facility.
- Hold staff meetings over the phone not in person.
- Delay or cancel nonessential gatherings of utility staff.
- Request electronic acknowledgement of receipt for all deliveries to your plant.

**7. How can we reduce workload for staff?**

- Reduce flow rate and flow rate changes through the plant.
  - Use other sources that have lower staffing needs.
  - Activate emergency inerties.
  - Coordinate with large or wholesale customers to reduce the impact of sudden changes in demand.
- Delay nonessential maintenance activities.
- Delay or delegate to other utility staff task that are not critical.
- Hire a contractor to do routine equipment maintenance and/or calibration and verification of critical instrumentation (turbidimeters, chlorine analyzers, pH analyzers). Instruct outside contractors to follow all protective measures in place at the plant.

## For more information

More emergency resources are available on our [Drinking Water Emergencies webpage](#).

Our publications are online at [doh.wa.gov/drinkingwater](http://doh.wa.gov/drinkingwater).

Contact our nearest regional office from 8 AM to 5 PM, Monday through Friday. If you have an after-hours emergency, call 877-481-4901.

[Eastern Region](#), Spokane Valley 509-329-2100.

[Northwest Region](#), Kent 253-395-6750.

[Southwest Region](#), Tumwater 360-236-3030.



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