

COVID-19 Strategic Sharing Group: Water Utility Management Response

Meeting Date March 27, 2020 from 1:00 p.m. – 2:30 p.m. EDT
Facilitator Kim Jusek, Canadian Water Network

There were 21 municipalities participating from coast to coast (see the [attendee list](#)).

This meeting serves as an update to the March 20th meeting on approaches and responses taken by municipalities/utilities across Canada for maintaining or scaling back municipal water services during the uncertain and rapidly evolving circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic (see the [meeting agenda](#)).

Summary

The following themes were discussed:

- Business continuity planning
 - Staffing structures, challenges, compensation, contingency planning
 - Prioritization and continuance of capital program and O&M work
 - Safe working protocols and practices
- Increasing provincial regulatory guidance and dialogue
- Effective and timely internal and public messaging
- Revenue impact projections: changing water trends, relief or deferral on payments

Update on Municipal Actions:

As this is a quickly evolving situation, there were several provincial regulatory updates in the past week:

- Greater guidance on operator qualifications in some provinces
- Discussions on relief for water quality sampling
- More clarity in some provinces around the operation of critical infrastructure designated as 'essential services'
- Guidance, or lack thereof, on continuation of construction projects
- Continued guidance on safe working practices
- Generally, utilities are starting to see more communication and collaboration between provincial regulators and cities

While there are varied regional approaches across Canada, overall, business continuity planning and implementation is underway to account for maintaining acceptable levels of service, protecting staff and the public, and contingency planning for a range of scenarios. A few of the key topics of discussion and decision-points this week have been around continuance of capital

programs and operations-related work in the community, handling of worker safety, and more detailed contingency planning for skilled workers.

Regarding the **continuance of capital** programs, there is a range of approaches across Canadian utilities and municipalities.

- Particularly in western provinces, business-as-usual approaches to construction projects and preventative maintenance programs are more common, with increased safety precautions and prioritization planning exercises underway or in place should projects need to be scaled back. In the central and eastern provinces, while there are exceptions there is a greater tendency to scale back non-essential projects and cease construction work altogether.
- Consistent across most communities is cessation of work which would interrupt water supply or necessitate any plant shut-downs.
- The ***decision on whether to continue or scale back capital projects*** is one that many municipalities are currently grappling with. This decision can be motivated by provincial guidance or requirements, health authority direction, and senior management decisions considering the ability to comply with safety requirements, third-party contractor or supplier withdrawal or inability to sustain projects, and/or feedback from staff and the public regarding perception of responsible actions. *Contractor, staff, and public relations and perceptions are becoming growing concerns.*

Overall approaches to **protect worker safety** are solidifying and evolving.

- Outside of BC, most utilities have non-essential or office staff working from home. Procedures around social distancing and disinfecting shared work spaces are being followed where staff are still performing their work in shared or communal spaces. Staff self-isolation protocols are also being implemented.
- Protocols for scaling back the field workforce, restricting facility access, and limiting interaction between shifts and different crews are being implemented to minimize exposure. PPE is in use for necessary home visits and circumstances where staff have to work within 2m of each other.
- Availability and type of PPE being used varies across the country, but this is less of a concern overall compared to last week, with municipalities prioritizing pooled resources for water/wastewater operators and a number of utilities have begun to ***make disinfectant in-house***, using diluted sodium hypochlorite which is readily available.
- A current decision some municipalities are ***seeking clarity on is return to work protocols*** if an employee or family member has been sick or self-isolating. Most utilities are taking guidance on this decision from their provincial health authority.
- Some advancements in terms of worker protection include:

- Temperature-taking and health self-assessments are being tested for workers entering job sites and facilities;
- Discussion with the provinces about prioritized COVID-19 testing for critical operations staff to reduce the turnaround time on results.
- Measures to provide access to washroom facilities for essential field staff (identifying city-facilities, implementing portable toilets, etc.).

More detailed **skilled worker contingency planning** is underway, connected to prioritization efforts around maintaining levels of service over a longer time horizon.

- Municipalities/utilities are continuing to identify through **staff skills assessments and operations prioritization exercises** which staff roles are essential, and contingency planning for scenarios where those staff may be in self-isolation or quarantine.
- Longer-time horizons, such as 12-18 months, are beginning to be explored to support workforce and operations with more permanent solutions.
- Recent regulatory guidance has been provided in Alberta and Ontario regarding greater flexibility on who is considered qualified to operate critical facilities.
- A greater number of utilities have begun to plan for **shelter-in-place scenarios** and identified trigger points for enacting such measures. This past week, [City of Brandon](#) in Manitoba implemented shelter-in-place for their water treatment plant.
- There has been limited discussion on coordinating with neighboring communities.

Key Emerging Challenges:

- **Staff compensation** remains an ongoing conversation at some municipalities/utilities considering reduced workload.
 - A number of utilities are currently undergoing decision-making regarding employee compensation considering reduced work output, reduced revenues, uncertain political and regulatory landscape, and uncertain time horizons, etc.
 - For the near-term, the majority have decided to continue to pay staff and have negotiated with their respective unions plans for pay continuity, and consider field or operations staff who can't do work from home 'on call' while reduced workforce practices are in place.
- **Staff mental health** regarding working arrangements continues to be a challenge.
 - Creating effective and timely internal communications has generally been a challenge despite strong communication channels, as the situation is evolving so rapidly.
 - Staff and increasingly their families are continuing to express anxiety over their health and safety in the work place.

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- Overall there has been a reported decrease in staff morale, and ensuring staff stay informed, connected and feel appreciated has been a growing priority for utility leaders. Some utilities are launching internal communication campaigns and a growing number are exploring other mental health support tools.
- There is a growing need for improved **public communications**, on two key topics: **1) essential construction or operations work**, and **2) flushable wipes**.
 - There is a strong trend of growing public concern being expressed around the continuation of construction and operations work in the community. Considering this, it may necessitate the utility to re-evaluate the appropriateness of continuing with certain projects, and/or seek to improve public messaging around the importance of this work to maintain essential water services.
 - Several utilities have reported the increase in non-flushable wipes and the negative impact this is having on sanitary collection systems and WWTPs. Some utilities which have not experienced this, credit early and strong public communication efforts.

Upcoming considerations and opportunities:

Looking ahead, some utilities are starting to consider longer-term strategies, both for managing a longer time horizon of adjusted utility management and to better prepare for coming out the other side of this challenging time.

- **Increased need for cross-sectoral and cross-departmental collaboration and cooperation.**
 - It has become clear that those experiencing less friction in making adjustments have embraced strong cooperation efforts with various stakeholders, including provincial regulators, local and provincial public health departments, municipal governments, local unions, local businesses including suppliers and contractors, neighbouring municipalities, and the public.
- **Financial impact assessments, in part due to changing water use trends**
 - While overall water use may be stable, utilities are anticipating a decrease in ICI water use and an increase in domestic demand. Some municipalities are starting to monitor water use to help with revenue projections.
 - Revenue projections underway are also considering impacts of delayed capital projects, reduced work output, and reduced revenue from tax and bill deferrals.
- **Testing wastewater for coronavirus to detect future resurgences**
 - There is an opportunity to implement a monitoring program to collect influent wastewater samples to study the concentration of the coronavirus before,

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during, and after the pandemic crisis, in order to better be prepared for the next wave of COVID-19; similar to what the [Dutch](#) are undertaking.

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Detailed Summary of Utility Responses

British Columbia: 970 confirmed cases of COVID-19 as of March 31st

City of Surrey

UPDATE:

- Continuing with business-as-usual and currently staffing remains un-impacted, but have implemented additional safety measures e.g. additional vehicles to space people out, field staff now wearing respirators (half face) and gloves if they cannot maintain a six foot distance or are performing tasks that require two people to work closely together.
- The needed protective equipment and disinfectant have been acquired, and the City has started to make their own supply of hand sanitizer.
- Starting to put plans in place if staffing levels change. The City has tiered tasks required to maintain levels of service;
 - 3 = essential
 - 2 = critical
 - 1 = business as usual
- Using this tiered system, they have begun to identify how many staff would be needed to implement tasks.
- Surrey City Hall continues to evaluate revenue impacts. Currently, there remains six weeks' worth of construction work in the queue (not including maintenance work).
- City of Surrey has negotiated a workforce adjustment agreement with their unions that include provisions for pay continuity for staff affected by any layoffs.

CHALLENGES/CONCERNS:

- Communication from City Hall to operations is a challenge. Not a lack of communication, but the fact that communication is evolving so quickly makes it hard to keep up-to-date.
- Beginning to experience a negative public perception with respect to why the City is continuing to construction work.

City of Vancouver

UPDATE:

- City of Vancouver is continuing with business-as-usual for capital projects and operations and maintenance.
- Several occupational health and safety procedures are being implemented at the office since the City is not yet set up to work remotely. This includes social distancing,

workplace hygiene and disinfection protocols, staggering start and stop times to keep critical staff on separate schedules.

- When entering a home, field staff are practicing distancing and wearing half masks and gloves; however, there are not many inside meters, so this has not presented a challenge so far.
- The City of Vancouver has developed a workforce adjustment agreement with unions representing internal and external workers. This will help to cover wage protections and layoffs for staff that are impacted by service and operations suspensions. *Note: does not currently apply to those working in water and sewer because they are operating under business-as-usual.*

CHALLENGES/CONCERNS:

- Because the City is operating business-as-usual, they are having some challenges with reconciling that with the provincial and federal messaging and some questions from the public about continuing with some visible construction and operations work during this time.
- Inside (office) staff continue to work on site because remote work capabilities are not yet set up. IT departments continue to address this.
- There remains a disconnect in communication coming from the EOC – slow response to needs like remote access.
- It has been a challenge maintaining cleaning supplies.

City of Abbotsford

UPDATE:

- Implementing increased safety procedures such as staggered shifts, single staff in vehicles, masks when field staff are working less than two meters apart.
- Minimum service levels and staff needs have been established.
- The City is pausing capital projects.
- When entering a home precautions are taken, such as distancing, half masks, and gloves; however they don't have many inside meters so it hasn't presented a challenge so far.

CHALLENGES/CONCERNS:

- Angst from public when they see the City is doing 'non-essential' work.

Township of Langley

UPDATE:

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- Maintaining safe, physical distance from each other when feasible.
- Operators have their own municipal vehicles.
- Senior and lower management have started to work from home.
- Paperless timesheets have been implemented.
- Crews from different departments are holding morning tailgate meetings separately.
- Purchasing department secured enough necessary supplies.
- To date, no shift altering has taken place to negate any un-needed exposure.

CHALLENGES/CONERNS:

- Communication has been an issue. Information is limited and not being openly shared.
- Anxiousness with temporary and full-time employees is noticed and morale is starting to wear.
- Issue emerging is sustaining coverage with trained and certified personnel.
- Sewer pumps in sanitary lift stations are requiring more maintenance due to wipes being flushed.
- Some suppliers of parts are not accepting orders.
- Lack of consistency with municipalities in the general areas. Some are aligned with the Township while others seem to be more progressive.

Alberta: 754 confirmed cases of COVID-19 as of March 31st

City of Calgary

UPDATE:

- Capital construction projects are currently operating business-as-usual.
- The City is in the process of setting up tiered scenario planning to identify which projects are most essential, which can be finished early, and which can be shut down.
- Operations are also continuing business-as-usual. The City is still answering calls, but has reduced non-essential ones such as meter checks and has delayed internal programs such as lead testing.
- Currently evaluating staffing arrangements and compensation (50/50 on-call vs. work), but they are interested in knowing how other utilities are handling this.
- Not currently experiencing any challenges with respect to PPE and hand sanitizer. There are some local distilleries and businesses helping to manufacture these things.
- The City is continually doing revenue projections and scenario planning but predicts the province of Alberta will be moving toward the path of shelter-in-place.

CHALLENGES/CONCERNS:

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- The City of Calgary is experiencing challenges surrounding staffing and communications – messaging is constantly evolving and getting the changing information from corporate to utility to field staff has been difficult.
- The City is dealing with a lot of angst from employees. There are processes in place for when field staff are going into homes, but there remain a lot of questions and a lot of concern.
 - *In response to this, the City is trying to pilot a video in collaboration with Alberta Health Services and Water to address questions coming from field crews.*

EPCOR

UPDATE:

- EPCOR currently has about 10% staff absences. All non-essential workers who can work from home have been working from home.
- Field work is continuing and EPCOR is keeping up with preventative and rehabilitation activities.
- Capital programs are at normal state but have been prioritized. They have identified which projects will be postponed first and the process they will follow to do that. The slowdown of capital work at EPCOR is for few reasons: social distancing, minimize exposure risk, a requirement not to work within 2 km radius of a health care facility.
- EPCOR has been proactive in reaching out to the regulator and Alberta Environment has been a great support and guide for the steps required to reactivate retirees and get them the required certification and clearance.
- EPCOR has identified what the critical activities are and the minimum staff required to respond. They have also identified trigger levels and what action is required if need be.
- Some critical staff are isolated and working from home such as control center operators.
- Preparing for the Government of Alberta to institute shelter-in-place protocols.
 - *In preparation for this, EPCOR is working to identify essential contractors and critical staff.*
- EPCOR will be piloting an employee temperature-taking initiative starting next week. Staff will have their temperature taken at the start of shift. If successful, this initiative will be adopted by all facilities.
- Plans have begun for a shelter-in-place with a trigger level of 20% community infection rate. If this trigger is activated, staff will remain at the facility and rotate every two weeks.
- Field staff are only going in homes in the case of emergencies e.g. burst meters, water quality issues. They have implemented donning and doffing procedures* with full

protective gear/suits and are conducting screening questions and asking residents to be in separate rooms and away from staff so there is no risk of droplet contact.

- **Note:** *field staff going into homes are not using respirators. Instead, they use face shields. Consultation with an occupational nurse who worked through Ebola has highlighted that COVID-19 is transmitted through droplet contact and it is not aerosolized or airborne. As a result, respirators are not required unless staff are doing something that would aerosolize it.*
- A 90-day grace period has been initiated for nonpayment of utility bills.
- EPCOR is seeking regulatory support from Alberta government e.g. relaxing number of samples taken.
- EPCOR has asked the government for prioritization in getting COVID-19 tests and results for critical staff.
- In Edmonton they have seen a drop in commercial water demand and a coinciding increase in residential water demand. We will continue to watch and see if this trend continues.
- Regarding flushable wipes, recently they worked with Global to share flushable communication in Edmonton and area.
- They have started an internal communication campaign to share positive stories about the work our front line staff is doing (especially when it comes from the public) and how important their work is in response to some of the concerns we have also heard from our internal staff.
- With the shutdown of most restaurants across the City, EPCOR has a plan in place to locate washroom facilities around the City for workers in trucks. This includes EPCOR or City facilities and sites where they could mobilize washroom trailers.

**Doffing procedure stipulates all items be removed, bagged. Staff are required to disinfect prior to returning to vehicle.*

CHALLENGES/CONCERNS:

- EPCOR has experienced some public concern as to why they are still working in the community on operations/construction projects.

Alberta Capital Region Wastewater Commission (ACRWC)

UPDATE:

- ACRWC is continuing to focus on protecting operators e.g. limiting access to control room, segregating operators from the rest of the staff, maintaining physical distancing.

Disinfection efforts have increased, and they are stressing the importance of not eating together, not sharing utensils, cups, plates etc.

- Field staff are limited to one person per truck.
- Most non-essential staff are all working from home except for one who remains on site to screen access to site and screen service providers and delivery providers.
- 20% of workforce is currently in self-isolation.
- Capital projects are currently business-as-usual but with extra protocols and precautions in place. ACRWC is also prioritizing these projects.
- ACRWC is beginning to prepare plans should they experience worsening conditions e.g. preparing central staff and service providers with necessary clearance documentation in the event of a shelter-in-place scenario AND what a shelter-in-place scenario would look like for central staff
- ACRWC is communicating daily with staff to provide updates and information from Alberta Health and any new and changing protocols they are putting in place.
- Business continuity planning processes have been initiated.
- Prioritizing staff appreciation and willingness to adapt and adhere the various precautions being implemented and working from home.
- All employees being paid whether they are working from home or being put on reduced hours. Maintenance staff is currently working 50/50 but are expected to be available at all times.

CHALLENGES/CONCERNS:

- Experiencing a shortage in supply of masks and procurement has been difficult.
 - *Note: supply of disinfectant is okay.*
- Spring runoff scenarios: currently conducting these exercises and emergency response drills online.

Saskatchewan: 184 confirmed cases of COVID-19 as of March 31st

City of Regina

UPDATE:

- The City is providing updates to the EOC daily, updates to the City Manager and executive team three times per week, and updates to union and HR meeting three times a week.

- Casual city staff have been laid off; however, water staff remain. City of Regina is looking into how they can maintain skill levels throughout departments where staff have reduced workload.
- Developing a skills list to determine where to focus on professional development in down times.
- Capital plan has been reduced; however, the City is currently evaluating which projects will go forward and which ones might be put on hold. Capital projects for 2020 that impact residents, such as projects that require temporary water, may not proceed.
- With respect to financial considerations, the City has deferred the tax deadline, there will be no shut offs, and the payment period has been extended with no penalty. As a result, they predict a reduction in revenue but are still unsure as to what extent. Consequently, they will be doing more work on revenue projections.
- Many of the office staff are working from home and it has been a fairly seamless transition.
- Have most of the protective and disinfectant supplies they need but are low on masks.
- Provincial initiative to open daycares to those working in essential services and water and wastewater has been extremely helpful.

CHALLENGES/CONCERNS:

- Unsure how revenue will be impacted and if they will experience declined usage.
- The City continues to experience challenges with the physical distancing of staff. They do not have enough vehicles to support single-occupant standards as vehicles are sometimes deployed in other departments and are being used for non-essential work.
- Public concern as to why they are still working.

City of Saskatoon

UPDATE:

- The City of Saskatoon has isolated operations and maintenance shifts. They are currently operating with a 1/3rd of their maintenance staff. Those at home are on limited duties e.g. job safety analysis, work planning.
- All staff are being paid in full.
- Operators have been isolated, so their shifts do not cross. Shift handover is now a more remote process and includes a deep disinfection procedure including wiping down with bleach.
- All office staff who can work from home are doing so to minimize staff in facilities e.g. engineering staff, training staff, supply chain staff.

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- The City is working with the local EOC – no immediate concern with supplies.
- Capital work is going ahead but there is increasing concern from contractors. As such, they are not forcing contractors to shut down capital work but simultaneously are not holding anyone to timelines.
- No home entry right now unless there is an emergency e.g. resident does not have access to potable water.
- Meter staff have been re-allocated to doing critical work such as cleaning plants. When there is water quality concerns, lab staff are doing sampling at hydrants in the street.
- Water demand is consistent; however, they do not know who is using it. They suspect higher residential use and less industry use. They will be monitoring this to assess the financial impacts going forward.

CHALLENGES/CONCERNS:

- Concerned with the pace of change in messaging from City Hall and the fact that this new information sometimes contradicts the messaging the utility is releasing and the implications this has for non-essential and essential work.

Manitoba: 103 confirmed cases of COVID-19 as of March 31st

City of Winnipeg

UPDATE:

- All workers that can work from home are now doing so. This has involved an expansion of IT access and several changes to work processes.
- Non-essential interaction with public has been suspended e.g. scheduled water meter replacements. When entering homes in emergency situations, crews now have safe work procedures in place e.g. screening questions and PPE for case-by-case assessments.
 - *Note: PPE includes masks, face shields and goggles*
- The City is no longer doing service shut offs for non-payment and have begun turning services back on regardless of bill status. This is in an effort to enable public compliance with Public Health guidelines for washing hands.
- Social distancing measures have been implemented within the workspace e.g. staggering shift start times to minimize staff interaction, using multiple vehicles for crews.

- Access to water treatment plant has been restricted – this includes internal staff.
- Restrictions and procedures have been implemented in the control room and for operator interfaces e.g. limited access, operators use separate entrances.
- Supplies are being coordinated via centralized city efforts and the City of Winnipeg EOC.
- Next steps are currently being developed for frontline shift work e.g. reducing hours, number of staff at work, staff pay.
- A challenge area is maintaining access for field crews to washrooms with all the restaurants closed. They are trying to designate City facilities in each city area.

Ontario: 1,966 confirmed cases of COVID-19 as of March 31st

City of Thunder Bay

UPDATE:

- Thunder Bay has reduced field staff levels to minimum.
- Many staff are currently working from home; however, the City is exploring options to bring staff back safely.
- The Province of Ontario has recently provided a temporary emergency order that has given regulatory relief with respect to collective agreements.
- Different work schedules are being explored in order to achieve balance – half working onsite the other half at home, on-call. All staff are being paid.
- Thunder Bay has begun to build a skills inventory database where they are compiling a list of workers who have previously worked in water, wastewater and solid waste.
- Water usage in Thunder Bay has decreased and it is assumed to be in the ICI sector. The water treatment plant has reported shutting down for periods of time because there is too much water in the system.

CHALLENGES/CONCERNS:

- Concerns for availability of PPE. They are experiencing supply issues in some places. The City is attempting to resolve this through a tiered approach;
 - Tier 1 = emergency services and is a priority
 - Tier 2 = solid waste collection staff and sewer and water operations
 - Tier 3 = all the other departments
 - *Note: Thunder Bay is currently looking to make in-house hand sanitizer lead by their chief chemist and is interested in learning more about what other utilities are doing.*

- Internal communications is a challenge because the rapid change in information makes it difficult to get that information to staff in a timely manner.
 - *Note: in response to this, the HR department has set up a portal where staff can access internal information from off-site. They hope this will improve the access to updated information.*
- Mental health and stress is of concern. They have been experiencing a more disgruntled workforce and a high level of anxiety. This has been challenging for supervisors as well.

Union Water Supply System

UPDATE:

- Starting March 16th and scheduled until April 6th all essential staff are working from home on standby and union staff (mostly maintenance) are all working from home on standby. Staff are working on a rotating schedule and have their trucks with them. All staff are getting paid.
- All non-essential staff are at home and working remotely.
- Contractors were sent home on March 16th and all capital projects have been paused.
- No home-entry unless absolutely necessary.
- Union Water has requested a relief for sampling protocols and other non-regulatory requirements in water systems e.g. drinking water license parameters.
- Shelter-in-place plans are be prepared should the need arise.

CHALLENGES/CONCERNS:

- Concerns from contractors regarding when they can return to work and continue projects.
- Concerns from some labs that they may not have available staff to do water quality testing. They are preparing for the scenario.

City of Hamilton

UPDATE:

- Physical distancing of field staff via single occupant vehicles and not entering homes unless there is an emergency.
- Construction is active although they are starting to see more concern from contractors about continuing with the work given the circumstances.
- Regulatory relief from the Province of Ontario has helped and individual municipalities are now being asked what regulatory relief they need.

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- Have roughly 1/3rd of crews working from home across all of Hamilton Water and crews that are in the field are working in isolation in their vehicles.
- Staff seem happy and are content to be working within the isolated conditions.
- City of Hamilton has begun communicating funny, lighthearted non-COVID-19 related newsletters to keep staff connected and keep morale up.

City of Guelph

UPDATE:

- Extended city closures of all city facilities beyond the original date of April 5th to April 30th. This includes City Hall.
- Building inspectors are supporting on essential commercial work being done locally and are making sure site staff have what they need to do their work safely.
- City of Guelph is currently examining tax deferral payments and are actively assessing those revenue impacts.
- They have taken inventory of which capital projects are critical and will continue to move forward and which risk being deferred.
- Protecting wastewater and water operators through rotating on-site work force. 50% on-site workforce for wastewater treatment, wastewater collection, maintenance and environmental protection. Staff working at home are on one week rotations and are connected and supporting Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) review, development, as well as online learning opportunities. All participate in a daily call-in team meeting.
- Wastewater collection field staff are limited to one person per vehicle.
- Staff are getting accustomed to “new norm” of operations. However, high emphasis on listening to staff and asking if there are any concerns and remaining connected and engaged with staff who are working remotely.
- As mentioned by others, O.Reg. 75/20 was released this week to provide significant options over and above collective agreements to continue operations at the wastewater & water utilities
- City not hiring seasonal or coop staff this summer

CHALLENGES/CONCERNS:

- Suspected industrial loading issue a week ago that placed strain on the wastewater treatment plant, particularly the nitrification process. Treatment plant is now in recovery mode.
- City of Guelph also not hiring seasonal staff or co-op positions

Region of Peel

UPDATE:

- Peel has begun to make homemade disinfectant/sanitizer based on instructions provided by the local public health unit using diluted bleach and putting into spray bottles, for use on spraying down vehicle steering wheels, etc.
- Moving forward as many capital projects as possible. However, not permitting any system shutdowns for two reasons:
 1. To ensure redundancy in the system
 2. To avoid tying up any operating resources to do shutdowns
- Important recent development this week has been the Province of Ontario extending the lien rights of subcontractors, suppliers, and trades. Effective March 16th, lien rights will not expire for anybody who was working on a project. This means that on any project whereby the Region of Peel was expected to return 10% back, they are no longer obligated to do that. Currently collaborating with legal teams on how to handle this, and looking at the option of accepting bonds from contractors instead of returning 10%.
- No significant change in demand detected. They expect demand has gone up marginally on the residential side and down on the ICI side.
- The Region is beginning to focus on the long-term (next 12-18 months) and how they will more permanently deal with the new reality. Currently, solutions are temporary and more permanent options are being evaluated.

CHALLENGES/CONCERNS:

- Concerned about normalizing temporary solutions, then being ill-equipped to respond should a second outbreak occur. They are exploring semi-permanent solutions.

Durham Region

UPDATE:

- Treatment and production are going well. They are staggering shifts at larger depots with a 30-minute pause in between to allow time for clearing out, and cleaning of vehicles. Only one staff per vehicle.
- Durham Region has adopted a “central store” model. Individual facilities are taking care of their needs but are placing extras into a pool that paramedics and police can draw from.
- The Region is currently identifying staff throughout the region that have a skill set that can be transferred to water or wastewater operations in an effort to build the staffing

pool. The new provincial regulatory relief helps with this as they now have the ability to re-hire retirees and temps. This way they don't have to re-train people.

- In Durham, they are still hiring students and temps as they are required to have at least an OIT certification so we are trying to build a pool of back up staff. The rationale is also that its easier to train now than later when experienced staff potentially dwindle.
- For disinfection of shared spaces, they are moving away from wipes, and also creating their own disinfectant.
 - *Note: If you go to your local health unit or Health Canada, there is a calculator that gives instructions on how to dilute 12% sodium hypochlorite – which is something many water utilities have an abundance of.*

CHALLENGES/CONCERNS:

- Durham Region is currently experiencing challenges in planning ahead and preparing because they have yet to receive information from Health and HR around what actions need to be taken should someone test positive in the workplace. The uncertainty makes it difficult to plan actions and staff.
- They would like to see a national push on flushables. It is having a big impact at a bad time, diverting the attention of qualified staff from areas that are of higher priority. Public communication surrounding this is needed.
- The Region is concerned that frontline water and wastewater staff are feeling unappreciated.
 - *Note: They are in the process of creating communications to show appreciation.*

Utilities Kingston

UPDATE:

- Utilities Kingston went to skeleton crews in all areas, as of Thursday March 19th.
- The Utility is trying to maintain ongoing service to the public. As of March 27th, customers were told they would get some relief on water bills as all water use would be charged at the 'conservation rate', representing a 25% savings.
- 60-90 day supply of critical supplies at their current burn rate.
- All staff are being paid and no lost wages at this point in time.
- Currently examining the ability of customers to pay.
- The Utility has lean water and wastewater plant operations. As of March 16th the plant has been locked down and only staff from those plants are permitted to access the site.

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- Currently exploring a return-to-work process for people who have been in isolation. In addition, they are currently developing an action plan for when an employee or an employee's family member is presumptive or diagnosed.
- The Utility is in the process of creating a 'critical operation centre', which would help them continue to operate in the event of one of their critical dispatch operators were to become ill with COVID-19 at their facility.

CHALLENGES/CONCERNS:

- Utilities Kingston has decided to eliminate hiring summer students for this year.

City of Ottawa

UPDATE:

- Moved to critical maintenance and repairs only.
- In the process of prioritizing capital works to determine what they will be able to support.
- Currently developing a shelter-in-place plan for plant operators in order to be prepared.
- Assumed skeleton staff levels. Roughly 1/3rd of workforce is at work at any given time. All staff are paid.
- Developing a list of employees that are able to back up for loss of critical staff. This is in accordance with the provincial emergency order.
- Long-term financial viability both on the tax rate and water rates is being evaluated. Currently, tax revenues are dropping significantly. About 30% of water consumption typically comes from the ICI sector and a shift in usage is expected.
- They will be developing facility screening procedures for all employees or contractors that are accessing their plants. This will include a combination of health self-assessments and checking temperatures.

CHALLENGES/CONCERNS:

- Seeking clarification on whether employees can be identified critical and could qualify for prioritized COVID-19 testing.
- Spring flooding risk is projected to be normal this year.
- Increase in non-flushable wipes in sewage systems.
- Experiencing regulatory challenges around operator certification and training, and following up with regulator for clarification.
- Experiencing supply issues for N-95 masks. Staff are using half and full-face masks but are also having trouble sourcing cartridges.

- Casual workers that are in rotation are not paid if they do not come to work. The City is noticing that this demographic may have a tendency to come in sick. They are exploring options to either lay them off or have special provisions to be paid.
- Service contractors (e.g. sewer cleaning contractors) are having difficulty accessing washrooms making it difficult for them to adhere to Public Health guidelines.
 - *Note: In response, the city is organizing a contract to have port-o-potties available throughout the city.*

Quebec: 4,162 confirmed cases of COVID-19 as of March 31st

City Of Montreal

UPDATE:

- All capital construction has stopped. Only essential construction is active.
- Staff scaled down to less than 50%. All teams in rotation and in isolation. Staff do not change teams.
- Enforcing distancing of two meters. Anything less than 2 meters is considered close and employees are required to wear protective equipment.
- Disinfection procedures have been established for equipment and workspaces.
- Procedures have been established to manage positive cases of COVID-19 among staff. However, no cases have been declared yet.
- Stocks of disinfectant and masks are plentiful at this time.
- Communicating rapid changes every day to keep employees updated and informed.
- Updated information is available on City website and can be accessed remotely.
- All employees are fully paid, whether they are on or off rotation in the schedule, as when they are not actively working they are considered 'on-call'.
- We are collecting influent water every day in the hope of conducting a study on concentration of coronavirus before, during and after the crisis
- As of March 25th and until at least April 13th, the provincial government has required all non-essential businesses to cease operations. Montreal Waterworks is considered an essential service, so the City of Montreal has had to request special clearance for contractors and suppliers to maintain activities.
- The City is exploring means for operational continuity with fewer employees and are potential options to have retired operators return.
- Montreal is collecting influent wastewater every day in the hope of conducting a study on concentration of coronavirus before, during and after the crisis.

CHALLENGES/CONCERNS:

- Employees are working from home but the City is still having difficulty with remote access.
- Monitoring drinking water is becoming more difficult with limited access to public buildings.

Nova Scotia: 147 confirmed cases of COVID-19 as of March 31st

Halifax Water

UPDATE:

- Operational challenges are very similar to what everyone else has been expressing.
- Focusing instead on what they are doing differently. There has been a lot of collaboration in Nova Scotia, including collaboration with unions on utility's perspective has been unprecedented.
- All inside workers were set up and working remotely within a week.
- All outside workers are one week on, one week off. Off week is considered on-call.
- Active effort to maintain the workforce. Municipality and utility are operating under the principle that they can continue to pay full time so long as they are getting 50-75% contribution from outside workforce. Impacts on revenues are anticipated if the pandemic persists, and they may have to revisit this.
- Collaboration between the province and the city has been strong. The provincial order exempted municipal water, wastewater and storm water services from social distancing and gathering restrictions. However, they are communicating to their employees and the public that they are following social distancing and gathering restrictions wherever possible. (<https://novascotia.ca/Coronavirus/COVID-19-Global-Order-2020-03-23.PDF>)
- Cooperating with municipalities and municipal utilities on how to approach property tax deferrals and municipal utility bill rate deferrals. The plan is to defer bill payments until July 31st. Rate payers stopped accruing interest as of March 13th.
- Safe work practices have been quickly adjusted after review by the Deputy Minister of Labour and Medical Officer of Health. This was done to expedite potential work refusals or reviews. The Labour Department has been helpful with labour-related complaints with respect to safety.


 Canadian Water Network's
Canadian Municipal Water Consortium

Attendees

Municipality/Utility	Participant
Alberta Capital Region Wastewater Commission	Wade Teveniuk
City of Abbotsford	Jamie Austin
City of Abbotsford	Ron Bernier
City of Calgary	Carolyn Bowen
City of Calgary	Nancy Stalker
City of Guelph	Arun Hindupur
City of Guelph	Tim Robertson
City of Hamilton	Andrew Grice
City of Hamilton	Cari Vanderperk
City of Hamilton	Nick Winters
City of Hamilton	Terry Josephson
City of Montreal	Carole Fleury
City of Ottawa	Tammy Rose
City of Regina	Kurtis Doney
City of Regina	Pat Wilson
City of Saskatoon	Russ Munro
City of St. John's	Lynnann Winsor
City of Surrey	Adam Quan
City of Surrey	Ravi Boyal
City of Surrey	Tara Macrae
City of Thunder Bay	Kerri Marshall
City of Thunder Bay	Michelle Warywoda
City of Vancouver	Andrea Becker
City of Vancouver	Michael Irvine
City of Vancouver	Samuel Li
City of Winnipeg	Tim Shanks
EPCOR	Christopher Ward
EPCOR	Cindy Shepel
Halifax Water	Cathie O'Toole
Halifax Water	Wendy Krkosek
Peel Region	Jeff Hennings
Region of Durham	Ian Mcilwham
Township of Langley	Jennifer Elderkin
Township of Langley	Rick Campagna
Union Water	Rodney Bouchard
Utilities Kingston	Allen Lucas

Agenda

Agenda: COVID-19 Peer-sharing – Water Utility Management Response	
Friday March 27, 2020 1:00 – 2:30 pm EST	
1:00 – 1:10 pm	Welcome and Introductions
1:10 – 2:20 pm	<p>Discussion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Each municipality/utility has approximately 3 minutes to share with the group, with some time for Q&A. • <u>Please consider the list of discussion points below.</u> Prioritize and share your municipality/utility's most relevant updates and your top challenges with the group, in order to flag common needs and/or offer insights and guidance to your colleagues. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Updates to emergency response and operations protocols to maintain business continuity, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prioritization of operations/capital projects. • Plan development for worsening conditions. • Worker health and safety precautions, including physical distancing measures. 2. Updates on key challenges, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workforce management (internal communications, mental health, IT challenges, field staff working arrangements, etc.) • Regulatory guidance. • Acquisition of protective equipment/disinfectant. • New or emerging challenges. 3. Updates on more forward looking opportunities, particularly as it relates to staffing challenges, including details on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scenario planning to prepare contingencies and identify trigger or decision points. • Details on staffing skills assessments; what is being considered, coordination among neighbouring communities, challenges with implementation, etc. 4. Other considerations: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revenue impacts and projections; • Compounding factors, such as spring floods, demand/flow changes, etc.
2:20 – 2:30 pm	Wrap-up