



Emergency Planning—Continuity of Operations Plan

331-656 • 3/26/2020

Your drinking water system is critical infrastructure to protect public health, hygiene, and sustain the economy. As such, making contingency plans to determine how you will sustain your operations is important, especially now. Such contingency plans that focus on how your water system maintains its core services are commonly referred to as Continuity of Operations Plans (COOP) or Business Continuity Plans (BCP).

Frequently Asked Questions

1. What is a Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP)?

A COOP is a plan for an organization to sustain its essential functions in response to an event that affects its operations. Such a plan helps utility owners, managers, and operators prioritize resources and staff to maintain essential functions. You can find detailed COOP guidance published by the [Federal Emergency Management Agency \(FEMA\)](#) and [Water Research Foundation \(WRF\)](#) online.

If you work for a small water system, completing the template for Sections 2, 3, 7, 8, and 10 in our [Emergency Response Planning Guide for Public Drinking Water Systems](#) would be a good place to start.

At its core, a COOP is about:

- o Deciding when you activate your COOP.
- o Defining your “order of succession” in case key people are unavailable.
- o Identifying the minimum “essential functions” you must do to protect public health and safety such as meet minimum pressure and water quality requirements.

2. When would I activate my COOP plan?

- o Key staff are unavailable.
- o Critical facilities, equipment, processes or supply chains are impacted.

3. During this emergency what is the most critical monitoring for a water system?

It is important to continue to monitor your water system during this time. Water systems use a multi-barrier approach to ensure safe and reliable drinking water. Here is a list of key water quality monitoring requirements.

- o Surface Water Treatment Plant monitoring (such as turbidity, disinfection parameters).
- o Groundwater disinfection system compliance monitoring for systems with a 4-log virus or CT 6 disinfection requirement.
- o Nitrate treatment monitoring.
- o Routine coliform monitoring in distribution.
- o Disinfection residual monitoring in distribution.
- o Treatment monitoring for other primary contaminants such as arsenic.
- o Water quality parameter monitoring under lead and copper.

4. What sort of documents would be helpful to reference in a COOP?

You should reference your current emergency response plans, monitoring plans, and Standard Operating Procedures (SOP). Make sure your monitoring plans and SOP are up-to-date and correct.

5. What is an SOP?

An SOP is step-by-step instructions on how a specific task is completed. An SOP should contain all the steps in the process so that someone who has never done the task can complete it. You should have SOP for how to collect coliform samples; monitor chlorine residuals; calibrate, verify and maintain meters and testing equipment; determine and/or adjusting chemical dosages; calculate pathogen (Giardia, virus) inactivation; backwash filters; or any routine task that you do.

After you write your SOP it is important to have someone test them. Give the SOP to one of your co-workers and see if they can follow it. Update as necessary.

6. How many operators do I need?

Your minimum staffing level depends on the characteristics of your water system. If you have a surface water treatment plant you need to staff the plant daily, unless you have an approved remote operations plan. You will have to determine what your system's essential functions are and how many operators you need to complete these items. We have [updated guidance for water system staffing](#) on our home page.

Many staff may work from home during this emergency. Water main break crews should understand their roles and be ready to mobilize when needed. Staff should also be available to make repairs and ensure continuity of operations.

7. What if our system has only one operator and they are sick and cannot work?

You may need to contact your designated backup operator the one you use when your operator is unavailable. If you don't have a backup operator now is the time to designate one. You may be able to share operators with other nearby water systems that have similar treatment technology. This is a good time to develop mutual-aid agreements and join [WAWARN](#). If you need help finding an operator please contact your regional office or check our [contract operator](#) or [approved satellite management agency](#) lists. If you would like to be added to the contract operator's list fill out the [application](#) and return it to the address provided or by email to DWOpCert@doh.wa.gov.

8. Should we continue with planned capital improvements?

This will depend on the how critical the capital improvement project is and if there is staff to complete the project. Construction projects critical to maintaining water treatment and pressures in the distribution system may need to maintain on schedule. Other less critical projects should be postponed.

9. How do I prove I am an essential worker when out operating my water system?

For certified operators, we recommend carrying a copy of your certification card to eliminate any confusion if asked why you are traveling around. Certified operators can print a copy of their validation card at the [Green River College web site](#).

10. What else can we do to prepare?

- o Check our [main ODW page](#) for guidance from us and leading professional organizations.
- o Contact your normal suppliers of chemicals, equipment, and repair parts to ensure these items will be available when needed; if not, locate other sources of needed materials before you need them.
- o Ensure you have updated contact information for your local emergency management department.

For more information

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

Our publications are online at 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.



To request this document in another format, call 1-800-525-0127. Deaf or hard of hearing customers, please call 711 (Washington Relay) or email civil.rights@doh.wa.gov.