

COVID-19 Response & Water Treatment Plant Staffing

Frequently Asked Questions

1. How can we get ready for a likely staff shortage due to the outbreak?

- Make sure SOPs 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.
- 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 ddwopcert@utah.gov to assess the ability of your staff to meet the needed level of certification. Discuss other options such as temporary certification.
- Prepare to activate other water sources (groundwater, emergency interties) 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.
- Join Utah Water & Wastewater Agency Response Network ([UTWARN](#)).
- Contact [UTWARN](#) to explore the possibility of accessing water operators with the required qualifications that are available to help operate your water system, including your treatment plant, as applicable.

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 SOPs in a 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 SOPs.
- Identify steps for 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 SOPs.

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 [UTWARN](#) and ask for help.
 - Be exact about what you need. Describe the type of treatment plant you operate and the plant rating. For example, a 0.5 MGD, surface water conventional filtration plant with chlorine disinfection.
 - If you are not able to maintain normal operation due to lack of staffing or if health advisory is needed, call DDW (main 801-536-4200, emergency response 801-560-8456).
- 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 ddwopcert@utah.gov to discuss options.
- 5. We have a local operator certified in another state. Will DDW honor another state's certification?**
- Contact operator certification at ddwopcert@utah.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 [CDC basic recommendations](#) to protect themselves (e.g., wash hands, do not touch face, keep 6 feet of distance between each other, face mask).
 - 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 non-essential 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 interties.
 - 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 tasks that are not critical.
 - Hire a contractor to do equipment maintenance and/or calibration and verification of critical instrumentation (e.g., turbidimeters, chlorine analyzers, pH analyzers). Instruct contractors to follow all protective measures in place at the plant.

Source: <https://www.doh.wa.gov/Portals/1/Documents/4200/FAQ-WTP-Staffing.pdf>