

Key Points Raised During IDEA Working Group Call on Emergency Preparedness COVID19

Current Risk-Operations Level

- Majority of utilities who spoke during call are at “essential personnel” only staffing, some are working remote
 - Some utilities are having to work through definition/get an exception as an essential worker. The designation must be in writing for people to have access and since the designation is jurisdictional – you can’t assume you are covered by existing categories (i.e. power generation, etc.)
 - Some guidance/form to get can exception is available through Homeland Security (Utility to provide a link).
- College and university campuses have primarily switched to online learning, but almost all have “some” students on campus for various reasons (international, already sick, worse conditions at home), working through operational challenges as a result. While occupancy rates in many buildings have declined, not all buildings are vacated and services must be maintained.
- For city systems, changes in operating profile (i.e. health facility customers versus those that have convention centers, hotels on the system etc.), this can mean same load required, or dramatic load reduction due to shifting vacancies and energy use. Important to know customer base and building occupancy variants.
- Priority is to keep systems running/reliable. General agreement that better practice is to avoid unnecessary disruption to operating systems, similar to postponing “elective surgery”. Some projects must continue due to the critical path they are on. Reliability is primary objective.
- FT staff has been minimally impacted, no active COVID-19 cases yet. But some shortage on project or system maintenance/repairs due to constrained/cancelled vendor access (e.g. GE gas turbine technicians @ UT Austin on flight/travel restrictions)
- In many cases, plant operations shifts are being split (A&B teams) and extended to 12 hour duration (try to protect at least one team/limit exposure in the case of an infection). Also, extensive surface wipedowns occurring by vacating and incoming shift personnel.
- Travel and security clearances. District Energy St. Paul has communicated with CISA, DHS and local government/mayor’s office (public health, police, fire, etc) to ensure that essential staff can have access to roads, customer buildings, etc. Do not assume that your system is deemed “essential services”. Categories are set by states and may be limited to power, natural gas, fuel and water systems. Each IDEA member was urged to seek written clearance as essential service provider in your respective city location. Get approvals in advance as lockdown conditions may increase, especially in denser urban settings.

Preparedness Initiatives – Employees

- Staff are being asked to self- monitor and check temps and report in on logs. Some systems are retaining third-party health checks. Overall message – “If you feel bad, don’t go to work”.
- One member reported providing individual thermometers to each employee to take temperature before reporting for duty. Monitor all symptoms but certainly self-monitor fevers.
- Encourage employees to use Telehealth services when possible; don’t go to hospital unless symptoms are severe.
- Log folks who call in sick and/or those that travel.

- Many systems reported HR and pay protocols are being updated to reflect essential service duty; remote work; and potential for “shelter in place” differentials.
- Health protocols include three days of no fever in order to “return to work”.
- On-site actual coronavirus testing is limited due to supply shortage. UT Austin is using Fluke sensors to take temperatures of employees on site, using surface thermometers to get a baseline
- Conditions in Europe and quarantines may be ahead of US currently. Even smaller municipalities are guarding against community exposure and implementing strict social distancing guidance.
- Supply shortages have also affected availability of PPE’s like masks.
- In some cases, employees being issued their own keyboards/mouse etc. that is normally shared equipment to minimize surface contamination. Devices are stored in locker by the employee between shifts. Only touching USB port to plug in rather than shared keyboard/mouse.
- For shared equipment, some are doing a full wipe down after each shift, however some have started a “wipe it after use it”, similar to the typical practice used at a gym. Don’t want to wait to end of shift because if someone goes down mid-shift, no idea what they’ve touched.
- Wipe-downs include equipment but also mundane things like microwaves, coffee pots, lap-tops, doorknobs, handles, etc.
- Open question about required maintenance that requires two people and space confines for completing it don’t allow for recommended social distancing – is there a protocol that should be considered?
- Case in point was planned maintenance of a feedwater pump requiring two people to lift and handle equipment. Discussion on whether it was a critical repair and if not, recommendation to defer such projects due to uncertainty on parts availability, potential for impaired or out of service situation. While maintaining “normalcy” was important, it was determined that deferring unnecessary projects was preferred to better ensure continuous operations. Better approach was to monitor condition but delay seasonal repairs until COVID health precautions are diminished.

Commercial Considerations – Impact on Business

- Capacity changes are dynamic and based on end use. E.g. Convention center/hotel usage has declined vs hospital showing increased demand as well as increased steam use.
- Currently in spring time weather “shoulder season” in North America. Peak cooling season is coming but currently customer demand is normal or slightly lower due to vacancies in some customer segments.
- Operators are stocking up on chemicals and “topping up” all appropriate volumes and tanks.
- Inventory management and avoiding non-essential maintenance. Can’t treat operations as “normal” – carefully weigh risk of deferred maintenance vs. current situation with virus
- There is a sense that more supply shortages are coming and that there may be a need to partner with others across IDEA regions for inventory management; replacement parts (unique valves or components in district energy systems).
- Cybersecurity risk is greater due to off-site access and increase in bad actor activity including phishing. One member reported significant uptick in attempted hacking or intrusions. IT departments need to monitor carefully as more employees are working remotely and accessing networks from home.

Communications

- Some utilities are looking develop a central message for media inquiries. Many are using direct and broadcast email; social media and message boards.

- Internal employee communications via email. Discussion about importance of consistency and timely information sharing.
- Enwave has been working for 3-4 weeks on information platform on Sharepoint for access by all employees. Need to have materials organized and easily accessible in central location for employees to review (Enwave SharePoint demo)
 - Enwave SharePoint structure included these categories: Company response; travel advice; forms; symptoms; prevention; health authority public notice; resources; committee members; working from home.
 - Enwave has operations in multiple cities. Local health protocols vary. It is important to monitor local conditions on the ground.
- Specific signage being used to prompt/remind of new COVID-19 protocols; declare spaces as confined or limited. Communicate with vendors/visitors on limited or no access.

Preparedness Initiatives – Facilities

- Tufts University using student "maker" spaces, repurposed as "militarized" zones for students who have remained on campus to 3D print masks and make bands for donation to local EMT's.
- Emergency day care center created, and dorm beds being prepared for hospital overflow
- Energy recovery wheels are being sealed and turned off to avoid risk of contaminated conditioned air.
- Emory Water Hub water reuse shut off to avoid risk of contaminating contiguous sanitary sewers between campus and nearby Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Campus (CDC) in Atlanta (contiguous).
- U Nebraska has a designated self-quarantine dorm.
- Multiple campuses reported instructions to students to not return to dorms after completion of spring break, but needing to provide continued housing for many students unable to travel or return home (foreign, quarantine, etc)
- Most campuses are allowing students to "shelter in place" and stay in their assigned dorm room, not wanting to create a cluster or setting where students are housed in single location and in contact.
- Emory has one designated site for positively tested and one for folks who are not able to travel off campus and must remain in place.
- Protocols are being written and released for bringing buildings that were shut down or in low use back to avoid Legionnaires etc. Dormant systems will require particular attention before re-activating.

Wrap Up Comments

- Enwave (C. Coutinho and K. Morrison) thanked all participants for sharing insight and experience. As situation unfolds, additional webinars may be prudent. Important for the industry to support individual members and share useful content.
- IDEA thanked all participants and provided information for follow up, webinar recording and access to slide deck. Please send information to IDEA for posting as repository. Survey results may indicate need for additional topics; deeper dive into specific topics. Members urged to utilize IDEACONnect on line forum for messaging, technical guidance, Q&A.