

March 25, 2020

**A message from the State Water Resources Control Board
Provision of Potable Water is an Essential Function**

It has come to our attention that some Public Water Systems (PWS), partners, and stakeholders may not have the clear understanding about the criticality of drinking water and that it is designated as an essential function to be maintained during emergencies, including the current COVID-19 emergency.



The operation of PWSs and the implementation of all associated activities, (including regulatory oversight, inspections, operations & maintenance, treatment, sampling, laboratory analysis, and others) that support the continued delivery of potable water during this pandemic are essential functions. If the provision of drinking water is curtailed it could mean the unavailability of water for maintaining sanitation, basic hydration, fighting fires, cooling, dust suppression, and water protection of public health. That service must continue.

Recent citations identifying water as an essential function include the following:

- From the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) - Information supporting the federal designation that drinking water is an essential function is provided at the following links - <https://www.cisa.gov/identifying-critical-infrastructure-during-covid-19>, <https://www.cisa.gov/water-and-wastewater-systems-sector>, and https://www.cisa.gov/sites/default/files/publications/CISA_Guidance_on_the_Essential_Critical_Infrastructure_Workforce_508C_0.pdf
- Governor Newsom Executive Order N-33-20 dated March 19, 2020 - <https://www.gov.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/EO-N-33-20-COVID-19-HEALTH-ORDER-03.19.2020-002.pdf> - all residents are directed to immediately heed the current State public health directives, which the Governor ordered the Department of Public Health to develop for the current statewide status of COVID-19 - consistent with the March 19, 2020, Memorandum on Identification of Essential Critical Infrastructure Workers During COVID-19 Response, found at: <https://covid19.ca.gov/>.
- State Public Health Officer order all individuals living in the State of California to stay home or at their place of residence except as needed to maintain continuity of operations of the federal critical infrastructure sectors, as outlined at <https://www.cisa.gov/identifying-critical-infrastructure-during-covid19> - <https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/Pages/Immunization/ncov2019.aspx>
- Notification from the SWRCB - UPDATED AS OF MARCH 20, 2020 Compliance with Water Board Requirements During the Coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19) Emergency - the Water Boards consider compliance with board-established

orders and other requirements to be within the essential activities, essential governmental functions, or comparable exceptions to shelter-in-place directives provided by local public health officials -

https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/resources/covid-19_updates/.

- Crisis Event Response and Recovery Access (CERRA) Framework, a voluntary guidance developed for emergency response planners at the State, local, tribal, or territorial level and outlines a process for managing access into restricted areas or emergency zones during an incident – identifies utility responders, including water/wastewater personnel, as needing Tier 1 (highest or immediate) access during and following disasters - <https://www.cerraaccess.org/>

So, being an essential function, those working in the water sector must be flexible and collectively work toward solutions to accomplish the essential tasks and maintain the essential services to which we have committed and of which our communities so critically depend upon.