

Operations and Maintenance

Infoshare Group

Report to BACWA Board

Committee Meeting on: 2/24/2021

Executive Board Meeting Date: 05/21/2021

Committee Chairs: Kevin Dickison and Joaquin Gonzales

Committee Request for Board Action: None

10 attendees representing 8 member agencies

Round Table Discussion – Adjusting to COVID

Agencies discussed the ways they have adapted procedures as a response to COVID. This is an ongoing challenge, as rules and best practices continue to change.

Staffing Schedules

- All agencies reported changes to staffing schedules to have fewer staff on-site at any given time. More staff are working on weekends, or shifts are spread out throughout the day.
- Some agencies split staff into cohorts that do not interact with one another (i.e., Team A and Team B), particularly toward the beginning of the pandemic.
- Agencies have been contacting retirees or staffing firms (e.g., waterTALENT) to ensure staffing reliability in case operators have to quarantine.
- Agencies have spread staff out physically by adding work trailers, or maximizing use of field sites located away from the main office (if available).
- Handling construction during the pandemic has been particularly challenging, especially if engineering teams are not working on-site.

Safety Precautions

- Plants have limited site access and implemented screening procedures, though the details differ by agency.
- Some, but not all, agencies reported closing or reconfiguring break rooms.
- Ride-sharing at work is restricted or not allowed. One agency reported that the inability to share vehicles prompted purchasing more electric carts to use at the plant.
- Implementing enhanced cleaning protocols have been a challenge, since it is time-consuming work. Operators have had to chip in with cleaning.

Recruiting New Staff

- Interviews have been shifted to Zoom, at least for first-round interviews. Some final-round interviews are being conducted in large conference rooms or Board rooms. Initially this was riddled with technical problems, but it has become smoother over time.
- Many agencies offer interviewees the ability to use a room on-site to allow interviewees to overcome challenges with conducting interviews at home (e.g., interruptions, internet access).
- COVID has made it difficult or impossible to conduct practical skills-testing during interviews.

Training and Testing

- Operator training and certification has been a significant COVID-related challenge.
 - Fewer operators are on shift together, which restricts the ability to conduct in-person training, and also makes it take more time.
 - Operator certification was a concern because routine paper testing had been temporarily suspended due to COVID. The State Water Board recently announced a shift to year-round, computer-based testing, which mitigates this concern.
 - Certification is important for promotions and advancement.
 - One agency reported that apprenticeship programs were temporarily suspended.
- Although training and certification suffered in 2020, many of the kinks have been worked out, and improvement is expected in 2021. The next puzzle to solve will be how to conduct group training when tests are offered on a rolling basis.

Transitioning Back to Normal

At least one agency has already announced that staff will not continue remote work when the pandemic ends; all staff will return to the office. Others have not yet announced a decision.

Ideas for future meetings

Poll members; Procedures for changing SCADA screens used for operations

Next Meeting: May 26th, 2021, virtual meeting format.