

Delivering Safe Drinking Water in the Midst of COVID-19 Pandemic

Shaun Livermore, Poarch Band of Creek Indians | NTWC Member

Have you ever played the egg toss game? If you have, you know that it is only a matter of time until the egg breaks, but you keep pushing the limits to win the game. This is not a strategy that will work when trying to figure out how to provide utility services during a pandemic. There is a lot more to worry about than an egg on your face. In uncertain times, there are many decisions that must be made with only speculation of what the total effect may end up being. There are other pressures that you do have to balance as you chart a course forward. There is an expectation for your customers and the needs of your employees that must be reconciled. The plan must be fluid, as the known facts seem to change every week.

The first thing that has to be done is to figure out what is an acceptable level of service. Professionals in all walks of life have pride that can skew judgement because they want to do the right thing for their customers. This requires a step back from day-to-day activities to help prioritize needs. There are certain activities that must take place and others that are more flexible. Listing these activities is a critical step. During this process, many things that are crucial to the long-term success and typically on a fixed schedule, moved down the list. This process was very difficult for me because the value of some of these activities show up in the budget after a year or more. Preventive maintenance saves utility money in the long run, but it is harder to schedule when you are trying to protect



Key messages to fellow utility personnel:

- Wear a mask, social distance and wash your hands to reduce the risk associated with the work you are doing.
- Stay positive even with the increased stress that is caused by these uncertain times.
- Remember, you are not alone. Invest extra time and effort in the relationships that mean the most to you every day.



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NEWSLETTER

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Poarch Band of Creek Indians Utilities Authority

The Poarch Band of Creek Indians Utilities Authority (PCIUA) is located in Atmore, Alabama with a total of 14 employees.

The PCIUA has two water systems (Tribal and Non-Tribal), a Tribal wastewater system and a Tribal solid waste system. The Tribal systems serve approximately 500 connections that has an approximate population of 3,000 plus transient population; the nearby Escambia Community Utilities is the Non-Tribal system operated and managed by the PCIUA with approximately 600 connections that serves a population of approximately 3,500.

The PCIUA had many challenges due to COVID-19 pandemic and sought assistance from various resources. Some of the resources and assistance were received from the following:

- Incredibly reliable and dedicated employees have proved to be the single most important resource;
- EPA, IHS, USET, and Alabama Rural Water helped identify available resources, such as securing PPE;
- Online forums and groups, as well as communicating with local utility personnel, to learn how others are responding; and
- Reliable vendors are always key in the utility field.

employees. There are other tasks that must be performed to protect the health of the community, such as daily treatment adjustments or disinfection levels. This was all considered when building this list of necessary activities.

The second thing that had to be done was to develop the new procedures that would protect employees. There are easier things to implement like masks, temperature checks, and social distancing. It becomes harder when you are scheduling activities and trying to limit overlap or unnecessary contact between employees. There are shared equipment, spaces, and trucks that must be addressed. Most employers settled on alternating shifts or split duties to limit the crossover of employees or shared use of equipment. This was not an easy task, especially when considering the habits that many have formed over the years performing these duties. The weight of making sure that the responsibility to the communities we serve feels much heavier when you are in a state of uncertainty or change. The people who perform these duties are not only trying to deal with the “new normal” at work, but also at home. Family requires extra attention in times like these, but when you are responsible for the continued health of a community, it requires compromise from those you care about the most. This is the *push and pull* that we all face in the utility industry.

Once the tasks were ranked and scheduled, we all took a breath. Then a call comes in from an employee who cannot come to work because they, or a family member, are sick. This requires adjustments on the fly and an increased burden to be passed on to the others. It is a family atmosphere at most utilities so that burden is graciously accepted with concern for their fellow employee. However, this still causes strain and the need for a break grows day-by-day. The constant adjusting and shifting of schedules is required to keep things moving forward despite the always present, unexpected issues that crop up daily or weekly with equipment failures or leaks. Currently, this is the situation utility professionals find themselves in across the nation. There are plans to take vacation once things settle down, overdo visits with loved ones, and a return to a more predictable routine brings hope to each of us. Pray for those who serve you and are sacrificing more than peace of mind to keep you healthy, because they need it.

Shaun Livermore is the operations manager for the Poarch Band of Creek Indians Utility Authority and oversees the water and wastewater facilities.

Updates and Announcements

NEW! Tribal PFAS Workgroup

The National Tribal Water Council has partnered with the National Tribal Toxics Council, Tribal Science Council, and the Tribal Waste and Response Steering Committee to establish a Tribal PFAS Workgroup. Per- and polyfluoroalkyl (PFAS) are a group of man-made chemicals that were developed in the 1940s. PFAS is found in many elements within our environment including food packaging, commercial household products, and firefighting foam, among others.

The objectives of the workgroup include:

- Evaluating the successes in addressing PFAS across tribal nations;
- Advocating for areas where there are shortcomings;
- Developing and improving communication methods about PFAS to others, such as elders and children; and,
- Developing guidance documents, such as social media templates, as needed.

For additional information, please contact Page Hingst, Tribal Science Council at (page.hingst@santeeoep.com), or Dianne Barton, National Tribal Toxics Council at (bard@critfc.org).

Clean Water Act Section 401 Certification Final Rule - Webinar Series

On June 1, 2020, the EPA finalized the “Clean Water Act Section 401 Certification Rule” to implement the water quality certification process consistent with the text and structure of the Clean Water Act. The final rule established procedures that promote consistent implementation of CWA Section 401 and regulatory certainty in the federal licensing and permitting processes.

The EPA is hosting a webinar series for states and tribes to learn about the final rule and implementation considerations. The webinars will include a Q & A session. The webinars will be recorded and will be available later for viewing. To register, please visit: <https://horsleywittenevents.webex.com/horsleywittenevents/onstage/g.php?PRID=b4828ab1fd5a181b58b4a1467bf0cdc0>

- Webinar 1: August 25, 2020 (3:30 PM - 5:00 PM EDT)
- Webinar 2: September 1, 2020 (1:30 PM - 3:00 PM EDT)
- Webinar 3: September 9, 2020 (3:30 PM - 5:00 PM EDT)

For more information, please visit: <https://www.epa.gov/cwa-401/final-rule-clean-water-act-section-401-certification-rule>

NEW! How's My Waterway - Informational Webinar

The EPA recently released *How's My Waterway*, a tool that assembles publicly available water quality data into a user-friendly package that provides information on water quality in our nation's waters. Map-centric and mobile-friendly, *How's My Waterway* works on all different screen sizes—from desktop computers and tablets to mobile phones. The Agency's goal is that EPA, partners and the public will use *How's My Waterway* to learn about water, explore data and find out what is happening to improve the health of our waters. The tool provides the public with an easily accessible and understandable summary of water quality at the community-, state- and national-level.

The EPA is hosting an informational webinar on the *How's My Waterway* tool on **August 27, 2020**. This webcast will include a live demonstration of the recently enhanced application. To register, please visit: <https://www.epa.gov/watershedacademy/how-s-my-waterway-special-webcast>

Enter your zip code on *How's My Waterway* (<https://mywaterway.epa.gov>) and explore the waters near you.

Tribal Consultation and Public Comment Opportunities

Tribal Consultation Opportunity: 2022 NPDES Construction General Permit

Ends: October 27, 2020

On August 13, 2020, the EPA released its proposed renewal of the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) Construction General Permit issued pursuant to the Clean Water Act. This permit is renewed every five years. The permit authorizes stormwater discharges from construction activities. For more information on the construction general permit, please visit: <https://www.epa.gov/npdes>

The consultation period will end on October 27, 2020. The EPA is hosting an informational webinar on Wednesday, September 16, 2020 (2:00 PM - 3:30 PM EDT). To register, please visit: <https://register.gotowebinar.com/register/5241471293956443149>. Information on this consultation opportunity can be found at <https://tcots.epa.gov/>.

Funding Opportunities

EPA's FY 2021 Brownfields Training, Research, and Technical Assistance Grant

Deadline: September 21, 2020

The EPA announced the availability of funding to provide technical assistance to communities on the integration of environmental justice and equitable development when developing solutions to brownfields cleanup and revitalization challenges. The application deadline is September 21, 2020. For more information, please visit: <https://www.epa.gov/brownfields/fy-2021-brownfields-training-research-and-technical-assistance-grant-0>.

EPA's Funding for Water Infrastructure Projects

Deadline: October 15, 2020

On July 14, 2020, the EPA announced the availability of funding for \$5 billion under its Water Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act (WIFIA) program. The program accelerates investment in critical water infrastructure through innovative and flexible financing for diverse projects.

Interested parties should submit a letter of interest by October 15, 2020. For more information, please visit: <https://www.epa.gov/wifia>.



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Upcoming Events

17th Annual EPA Drinking Water Workshop: Small System Challenges and Solutions

August 31 - September 3, 2020

The EPA's free annual drinking water workshop, held in partnership with the Association of State Drinking Water Administrators (ASDWA), will be held on August 31 to September 3, 2020. An in-depth training is offered on August 31st. This virtual workshop will provide in-depth information and training on solutions and strategies for handling small drinking water system challenges with focus on monitoring, distribution, source, and treatment topics.

To view the agenda and register, visit <https://www.epa.gov/water-research/17th-annual-epa-drinking-water-workshop-small-system-challenges-and-solutions>.

2020 National Tribal & Indigenous Climate Conference

September 14-17, 2020

The ITEP is honored to host the United States' First Biennial National Tribal and Indigenous Climate Conference (NTICC) along with support from the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) Tribal Resilience Program. The NTICC is open to all US tribal nations and Indigenous Peoples from throughout the world, with an emphasis on including our Elders and Youth. The NTICC will convene experts on climate change and will include a balance of Traditional Indigenous Knowledges and Western Science.

The deadline to register is **August 31, 2020**. For more information, visit <https://sites.google.com/view/2020-nticc-itep/home?authuser=0>.

Upcoming Webinars

First Nations: Native Lands Stewardship Webinar Series

This webinar series is intended for natural resource professionals, particularly those working on tribal lands, and other interested in learning innovative approaches to ecological stewardship.

- September 3, 2020 (12:00 PM MST): Decolonizing Regenerative Agriculture

To register, visit <https://www.firstnations.org/projects/native-lands-stewardship-webinar-series/>

Newly Updated EPA Sanitary Survey App

The EPA will hold an informational webinar for tribes to introduce users to the updated Sanitary Survey App and answer questions. You may join the webinar at one of the following two times:

- September 15, 2020 (2:00 - 3:00 PM EDT). To enter, visit: <https://epawebconferencing.acms.com/epassatribes1/> and click on 'guest'.
- September 23, 2020 (2:00 - 3:00 PM EDT). To enter, visit: <https://epawebconferencing.acms.com/epassatribes2/> and click on 'guest'.

For more information, please visit: <https://www.epa.gov/beach-tech/beach-sanitary-surveys> or contact EPA at EPA_SanitarySurveyApp@epa.gov

Upcoming Webinars *(continued)*

EPA Small Systems Monthly Webinar Series

- October 27, 2020: Disinfectants and Disinfection Byproducts

To register, visit <https://www.epa.gov/water-research/small-systems-monthly-webinar-series>

EPA Water Research Webinar Series

- September 30, 2020: Wildfires & Resulting Impacts to Water Bodies Used as Drinking Water Sources
- October 28, 2020: Health Effects Associated with Harmful Algal Blooms and Algal Toxins

To register, visit <https://www.epa.gov/water-research/water-research-webinar-series>

NTWC Members – For more information, visit [Meet the Council](#).

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