



Securing Your Water Supply

Western Municipal Water District

COVID-19 Outreach Plan

Updated Monday, March 30, 2020

(plan is fluid and subject to change as incident response evolves)

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UPDATES AND MODIFICATIONS TO THE OUTREACH PLAN

Date	Author	Modification Description	Section Modified
03/23/2020	Sarah Macdonald	Outreach plan draft developed	Full document produced
03/27/2020	Michelle Adams	Added to proposed timelines and tactics; completed full document review	Proposed timeline and tactics; full document review
03/30/2020	Sarah Macdonald	Added Metrics section; reviewed full document	Full document review; Metrics Report

INTRODUCTION

In response to the rapidly evolving COVID-19 (Coronavirus) pandemic of 2020, Western Municipal Water District is supporting a comprehensive communications and outreach plan, including internal and external communications.

A key component of the global management of the novel coronavirus is making sure that our communities are informed, educated and engaged as ongoing developments are released at a swift pace. Responding to this crisis requires thorough, deliberate and timely communication.

This plan builds on Western's priority of delivering consistent essential services through transparent, proactive, engaging and responsive communication.

The purpose of this plan is to ensure timely water service-related information is shared with customers, businesses, member agencies and other stakeholders. Customers and residents in Riverside County need to know the following:

- Public health and employee health is the top priority.
 - Water and wastewater service is not affected by COVID-19.
 - Existing treatment and water quality standards remove viruses from water, including COVID-19.
 - To protect public health, Western facilities have been closed to the public; however, customers can still do business online, over the phone or via email.
- Customers can count on Western to keep water and wastewater services flowing.
- Customers can turn to the tap to stock up on water; there is no need to stockpile bottled water.
- With an uptick in toilet paper and cleaning supply purchase, toilet paper is scarce for some. It is critical that only the three "P"s--poop, pee and (toilet) paper—are flushed down the toilet.

The campaign stresses that when Western customers turn on their tap, they can count on their water being purified, tested and monitored to protect their health and safety.

COVID-19 BACKGROUND

On February 11, the World Health Organization announced COVID-19 (Coronavirus) as the official name for the disease that caused the 2019 novel coronavirus outbreak, which has carried into the early months of 2020. On Wednesday, March 5, Governor Newsom declared a State of Emergency as part of the state's response to address the global outbreak.

Not only is the issue evolving daily, but National Public Radio noted that the coronavirus outbreak has sparked what the World Health Organization is calling an "infodemic" — an overwhelming amount of information on social media and websites.

Government communicators across North America are continuing to assess their response plans and offer real-time messaging to provide critical health and safety information during the rapidly evolving situation.

With the incident expected to span several months, Western is taking a proactive approach to communications by building a sustainable outreach response plan with clear goals, strategies and tactics. Ultimately, the plan's vision is to enhance customer trust in Western and increase awareness of the value Western brings to the community as an essential services provider.

COMMUNICATIONS GOALS

The primary goal is to create a responsive, timely and adaptable outreach campaign that educates customers, businesses, member agencies and other stakeholders about water quality and supply, specifically in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The plan's goals include:

- Educate customers that their water quality and supply is unaffected by COVID-19.
- Reinforce and assure customers that their water is safe to drink and wastewater services will continue.
- Remind customers that Western delivers its customers the highest quality water available.
- Coordinate and develop a unified approach and messaging with member agencies and partner districts surrounding the rapidly evolving issues associated with COVID-19 response, including monitoring and responding to local, state, and federal regulatory actions.

TARGET AUDIENCE

- **Primary:** Customers: wholesale and retail, including residential, landscape and commercial
- **Secondary:** Riverside County residents and businesses

KEY MESSAGES

WESTERN WATER SUPPLY AND QUALITY

- **Tap water is safe to drink.** The COVID-19 (Coronavirus) has no impact on the quality or supply of your tap water. While the situation is rapidly evolving, you can count on your water today and always. Western's keeping services flowing.
 - Tap water is safe to drink. Western is committed to providing its customers with safe and reliable water. We use advanced treatment processes to eliminate pathogens, which includes coronaviruses. This ensures safe drinking water for all our customers.

- When Western customers turn on their tap, they can count on their water being tested, treated and monitored to protect health and safety. Western conducts more than 4,500 water quality tests annually to ensure your water quality meets and exceeds state and federal drinking water standards.
- Western delivers only the highest quality water and meets all stringent state and federal drinking water requirements, which is detailed in Western’s current Water Quality Report available at wmwd.com/waterquality.
- **Tap water is plentiful - stock up on tap water.** While it’s always advisable to stock bottled water at home in case of emergencies that could disrupt water supply or service, this health outbreak is not expected to disrupt our supply and therefore service to our customers. Your tap water is reliable and plentiful.
- **Western keeps wastewater (sewer) services flowing.** Western is keeping your sewer services flowing but we need your help too. Only flush the three “P”s—Pee, poo and [toilet] paper. Wipes and other products clog the pipes. Western encourages you to keep wiping down those surfaces and keeping things clean, but be sure to throw wipes, facial tissue and paper towels away in the trash. Flushing (disposable) wipes down the toilet can clog your pipes and wreak havoc on the sewer system.

EMERGENCY PLANNING, FACILITIES AND STAFFING

- Public access to Western facilities has been closed to keep customers and employees healthy. We are still here to make sure you have reliable water service. Customers can do business online, over the phone or via email.
- To maintain the important activities of our Board while keeping public health a top priority, Board and Committee meetings will be virtual. Customers and members of the public are encouraged to participate and offer public comment via email, which will allow us to make decisions while continuing to ensure public engagement. Customers can view Board Meetings live through online streaming at wmwd.com/boardmeeting. Meetings will be rebroadcast through Riverside County’s government access channel.
- Western has activated a Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) Pandemic Response Plan (plan) that integrates into our “all-hazards” approach to emergency management. The plan outlines actions that start with early communication and updates on the spread of illness and impacts to water supply operations.
- While the world has never faced a situation quite like the Coronavirus, Western continually plans, trains, prepares and invests every day to deliver safe water and provide wastewater (sewer) services to nearly 1 million people, both wholesale and retail customers across Western Riverside County. The current circumstances may change the way we do business for a short time, but not our commitment to doing excellent work for those we serve.

- As Western continues to closely follow developments with the virus, staff remain committed to offering an exceptional user experience by pairing consistent delivery of safe, reliable drinking water with outstanding customer service.

WESTERN INVESTMENTS DURING A PANDEMIC

- Western prides itself in using customer dollars responsibly to build, monitor and maintain the systems that deliver water and sewer services, today and always.
- While Western is not immune from market fluctuations, Western takes a conservative approach to investing in compliance with State Government Codes and Western’s own investment policy. Our investment objectives are to ensure safety, liquidity and yield, which help ensure as much financial stability as possible during downturns in the economy.
- Western does not invest its reserves in stocks, but rather in highly rated and secure investments such as US Treasury notes, US Agency notes, and Corporate notes.
- Because of Western’s conservative investment policies and responsible fiscal stewardship, Western is as protected as it can be even as markets rapidly fluctuate during this unprecedented pandemic.
- Where to find more information: Western updates will be available on wmwd.com/coronavirus. For more information about Coronavirus, visit www.cdc.gov/coronavirus. For updates specific to Riverside County, visit Riverside County’s Public Health website, <https://www.rivcoph.org/coronavirus>. To learn more about Western’s water quality, visit www.wmwd.com/waterquality.

COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGIES & TACTICS

Strategy One: Branding

- Develop a unifying look and feel for all COVID-19 outreach campaigns that retain consistency with the Western brand and are appealing to target audiences

Strategy Two: External Coordination

- Coordinate weekly with regional member agency communications teams to ensure unified messages in response to COVID-19
- Provide member agencies with Western’s outreach materials including:
 - News release
 - Website content
 - Social media post plan
 - Key messages
 - Fact Sheet
 - FAQs

Strategy Three: Key Messages

- Develop key messages surrounding issue that can be used by executive management, elected officials, staff, etc.
- Create incident FAQ sheet, specifically addressing water/wastewater issues; Develop FAQs and make available on Western's incident web page

Strategy Four: Governmental Relations

- Coordinate weekly with regional member agency governmental relations teams to ensure unified messages in response to COVID-19
- Monitor State and Federal policy changes, and stimulus packages
- Monitor regulatory legislation and draft support/opposition positions as appropriate
- Coordinate with industry associations
- Educate local elected officials and other external stakeholders (Chambers) on water-specific responses; share Western information

Strategy Five: Internal Communications

- Support Western's internal Business Continuity Team
 - Daily agenda and action steps
 - Coordination of department updates for employees
- Develop internal key messages to be used by Western's Executive Management Team (EMT)
- Support daily email to staff with incident update information
- Produce weekly employee video update from the General Manager
- Draft and publish Everbridge emergency notifications, only as incident demands
- Employee templates for building closures and remote work to include email signature line, voicemail, customer service messaging, and office signage
- Establish COVID-19 resource repository (web page) that can be accessed on- and off network that provides staff with Western's current direction, policies, procedures, FAQs and tips
- Coordinate with service groups weekly to identify frequently asked questions and adjust outreach efforts around customer feedback

- Share public outreach effort to staff and provide informational materials

Deliverables:

- Review plan with executive management team (EMT)
- Share key messages and materials with Board of Directors
- Key messages shared with front-line customer services staff, executive management and elected officials
- Provide EMT weekly review of outcomes metrics
- Provide EMT and all-staff weekly summary of public feedback received

Strategy Six: Public Information

- Develop web page
Place web page on Western’s website and make available through the homepage. The web page should include at minimum: background, what this means to customers, important Western updates such as closures, suspension of shutoffs, etc., resources to learn more, and contact information for questions
- Web alert
Update Western’s home page web alert daily; if no updates, adjust time stamp so customers know the information is current.
- Bill Insert – both digital and print (English and Spanish)
- On Tap Article
- Weekly news releases published to Western’s website reinforcing Western’s key messaging; Western will not be the authority on public health updates, information or pandemic response
- Weekly customer e-blast specifically related to incident reinforcing key Western’s key messaging; Western will not be the authority on public health updates, information or pandemic response
- Customer video update from the General Manager (twice per month)
- Comprehensive social media post plan
 - Copy writing for social media posts
 - Recommended posting schedule
 - List of thought leaders to engage
 - Art for posts
 - Hashtag list

Strategy Seven: Media Relations

- Engage media in outreach efforts (position Western as the go-to source for factual information)

Deliverables:

- Media kit to include
 - News release
 - Identification of subject matter experts
 - Art/B-Roll
- Media pitch for campaign coverage and potential show and tell
- Op-ed topic list and/or ghost-written article

Strategy Eight: Community Relations

- I. Rollout external campaign to member agencies, industry associations, Riverside Chamber, community groups such as Woodcrest MAC, RAGLM, etc.
- II. Develop list of like-minded social media accounts and encourage accounts to share campaign messaging

Strategy Nine: Advertising

- Social media campaign

Deliverables:

- Social media campaign brief
 - Copy writing for social media ad
 - Recommended ad tool
 - List of thought leaders to engage
 - Art for posts
 - Hashtag list
- Advertisement (optional – only if incident extends over several months and water issues become significant)
 - Consider purchasing print ads in community newspapers.
 - Consider purchasing geotargeted digital display ads.
 - Develop Facebook and Instagram ad campaign (See above)
 - Cohesive regional message on behalf of Western and member agencies – consider extending to larger wholesale agencies as well (i.e. IEUA, SBVMWD, EMWD)

BUDGET

COVID-19 outreach response efforts will be supported by Western’s in-house team. Strategic Communications will leverage existing budgeted funds to support any deliverables outside of standard program costs. All staff time or materials purchased to support COVID-19-related outreach will be appropriately coded using the pandemic response codes provided by payroll.

Upon approval of the outreach plan, the plan’s implementation is to be overseen by the Strategic Communications Department in coordination with the Business Continuity Team that has been assembled to support COVID-19 response.

PROPOSED TIMELINE AND PROJECT ROLES

* note, schedule subject to c as COVID-19 is a rapidly evolving crisis response.

PROPOSED TIMELINE

TACTIC	DELIVERABLE	TIMEFRAME	OWNER(S)	APPROVER	STATUS
Outreach Plan	Outreach Plan Draft	March Week 2	Sarah Macdonald	Craig Miller	In Progress
Branding	Cohesive style for digital outbound communications	March Week 2	Michelle Adams	Sarah Macdonald	Complete
Weekly Coordination with Regional Communications Partners	Process for establishing communication with written weekly update	March Week 2; ongoing weekly	Sarah Macdonald	NA	Complete
Provide Member Agencies with Outreach Materials	NA – task action required on as needed basis	March Week 2; Ongoing	Sarah Macdonald	NA	In Progress
External Key Messages	Drafted talking points	March Week 2; weekly updates	Michelle Adams	Sarah Macdonald	Draft completed; two updates completed; continual updates in progress
Fact and FAQ Sheet	Draft and designed collateral (primarily for digital distribution and website)	April Week 1	Copy – Lynne Butler Design -Son Bui	1) Michelle Adams 2) Sarah Macdonald	In the queue
Regional Governmental Relations Coordination	Process for regular coordination; biweekly report on agency protocol	March Week 2; weekly thereafter	Michael Hadley	Sarah Macdonald	Process established; biweekly reports in progress
Monitor State and Federal Policy Changes, and Stimulus Packages	Weekly email update about any new developments	March Week 2; weekly thereafter	Michael Hadley	Sarah Macdonald	Weekly updates in progress

Monitor Regulatory Legislation and Draft Support/Opposition Positions as Appropriate	Support/oppose letters as needed	March Week 2; ongoing	Michael Hadley	Sarah Macdonald	In progress
Coordinate with industry associations on legislative updates and communications toolkits	Weekly report out on association activity	March Week 4	Michael Hadley	Sarah Macdonald	In queue
Social Media Campaign	Cohesive social media outreach with visuals to support branding and copy to support key messages; weekly report on metrics	March Week 2; ongoing	Savvy West Coast Media	1) Michelle Adams 2) Sarah Macdonald	In progress
News Release Schedule	Identify weekly topics and distribution schedule; Weekly development and distribution	April Week 1	Topic schedule – Michelle Adams Copy – Lynne Butler Distribution – Sarah Macdonald	1) Michelle Adams 2) Sarah Macdonald 3) Craig Miller	Topic schedule in progress; two news releases have been published
COVID-19 Employee Resource Web Page	Develop an on- and off-network resource page for employees; initial development and ongoing maintenance	April Week 1	Owner – Nicole Ventimiglia Support – Lynne Butler, Human Resources	1) Michelle Adams 2) Sarah Macdonald	In progress
Customer e-Blast	Identify weekly topics and distribution schedule; weekly development and distribution thereafter	April Week 1	Copy – Lynne Butler Design/Distribution – Nicole Ventimiglia	1) Michelle Adams 2) Sarah Macdonald	In the queue; two e-blasts have been distributed

METRICS REPORT

Update: Through March 27, 2020

A weekly outcomes report will be issued to track tactic performance, overall campaign outcomes and document plan implementation.

Direct Customer Outreach via e-Blast

Previous e-Blast details and current read rates below. Average industry read rate for government is 18 percent.

- March 20, 2020 (11:30 a.m.) ([You can count on Western, we are here to serve you!](#))
 - Total email distribution = 15,128
 - Open Rate = 34.5 percent (Desktop 45.5 percent / Mobile 54.5 percent)
 - Customer responses = 2 (Positive)
- March 18 2020 (6:44 p.m.) - [For immediate release: Western takes steps to suspend water shutoffs and late payment penalties; customer lobby to close to protect public health](#)
 - Total email distribution = 15,104
 - Open Rate = 45.7 percent (Desktop 52.3 percent / Mobile 47.7 percent)
 - Customer responses = 1 (Positive)
- March 17, 2020 (8:03 p.m.) - [For immediate release: Western's got you covered, assuring water supply continuity and quality while encouraging customers to help flatten the curve and opt online for business](#)
 - Total email distribution = 15,103
 - Open Rate = 53.2 percent (Desktop 48.6 percent / Mobile 51.4 percent)
 - Customer responses = 4 (2 Positive, 2 Negative)

Social Media (March 1-24, 2020) – Specific to COVID-19

- Total Posts: 36 (↑3)
- Total Impressions: 11,855 (↑1,139)
(The number of times content is displayed)
- Total Engagements: 519 (↑36)
(The number of interactions people have with your content (i.e.: likes, comments, shares, retweets, etc.))
- Total Link Clicks: 17 (No change from prior week)

Website (March 1-23, 2020)

These numbers needed be adjusted to factor in ONLY external traffic. Increases are comparable between raw data and external only data.

- Total Visits (all users) = 14,695 (↑635)
- Total Page views = 25,290 (↑1,296)
- Top 3 Pages
- Online bill pay = 2,110 page views (↑85), 8.3 percent of traffic (↑0.1)
- Job opportunities = 1,922 page views (↑47), 7.6 percent of traffic (↓0.2)

- COVID-19 = 1,701 page views (↑62), 6.7 percent of traffic (↓0.1)

Customer Video Updates

- Video No. 1, posted March 19, 2020
 - Total views: 144
 - Average view duration: 1:32

News Releases

- Number of News Releases Posted: 2

Media Inquiries

- Total Media Inquiries: 2

Internal Communications – Specific to COVID-19

- Total Email Updates: 14
- Total Video Updates: 1
 - Total Views: 84
 - Average view duration: 5:56

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