COVID-19 INDUSTRY GUIDANCE:

Energy and Utilities

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OVERVIEW

On March 19, 2020, the State Public Health Officer and Director of the California Department of Public Health issued an order requiring most Californians to stay at home to disrupt the spread of COVID-19 among the population.

The impact of COVID-19 on the health of Californians is not yet fully known. Reported illness ranges from very mild (some people have no symptoms) to severe illness that may result in death. Certain groups, including people aged 65 or older and those with serious underlying medical conditions, such as heart or lung disease or diabetes, are at higher risk of hospitalization and serious complications. Transmission is most likely when people are in close contact with an infected person, even if that person does not have any symptoms or has not yet developed symptoms.

Precise information about the number and rates of COVID-19 by industry or occupational groups, including among critical infrastructure workers, is not available at this time. There have been multiple outbreaks in a range of workplaces, indicating that workers are at risk of acquiring or transmitting COVID-19 infection. Examples of these workplaces include long-term care facilities, prisons, food production, warehouses, meat processing plants, and grocery stores.

As stay-at-home orders are modified, it is essential that all possible steps be taken to ensure the safety of workers and the public.

Key prevention practices include:
- ✓ physical distancing to the maximum extent possible,
- ✓ use of face coverings by employees (where respiratory protection is not required) and customers/clients,
- ✓ frequent handwashing and regular cleaning and disinfection,
- ✓ training employees on these and other elements of the COVID-19 prevention plan.

In addition, it will be critical to have in place appropriate processes to identify new cases of illness in workplaces and, when they are identified, to intervene quickly and work with public health authorities to halt the spread of the virus.

Purpose

This document provides guidance for the energy and utilities industry to support a safe, clean environment for workers. The guidance is not intended to revoke or repeal any employee rights, either statutory, regulatory or collectively bargained, and is not exhaustive, as it does not include county health orders, nor is it a substitute for any existing safety and health-related regulatory requirements such as those of Cal/OSHA.[1] Stay current on changes to public health guidance and state/local orders, as the COVID-19 situation continues. Cal/OSHA has more comprehensive guidance on their Cal/OSHA Interim General Guidelines on Protecting Workers from COVID-19 webpage. CDC has additional guidance for businesses and employers.

Work Specific Plan

- Establish a written, worksite-specific COVID-19 prevention plan at every facility, perform a comprehensive risk assessment of all work areas, and designate a person at each facility to implement the plan.

- Identify contact information for the local health department where the facility is located for communicating information about COVID-19 outbreaks among employees.

- Train and communicate with employees and employee representatives on the plan.

- Regularly evaluate the workplace for compliance with the plan and document and correct deficiencies identified.

- Investigate any COVID-19 illness and determine if any work-related factors could have contributed to risk of infection. Update the plan as needed to prevent further cases.

- Identify close contacts (within six feet for 10 minutes or more) of an infected employee and take steps to isolate COVID-19 positive employee(s) and close contacts.

- Adhere to the guidelines below. Failure to do so could result in workplace illnesses that may cause operations to be temporarily closed or limited.

- Employers engaged in construction of energy and utilities infrastructure should also refer to the guidelines for [construction employers](#).

Strategic Operation Plan

- Identify whether decisions to increase/suspend/reduce operations at key accounts will impact load balancing.

- Determine whether the organization has identified facilities critical to the operation of the energy grid and has made accommodations for sequestering at those facilities (on-site food/water/hygiene/medical, family services, personal protective equipment, etc.).

- Develop a plan and process to prioritize work in areas involving exposure to hazardous substances, including prioritization of work orders and requests and response times for leaks.

- Minimize the number of persons at cooling centers by implementing a temporary ban on utility shut-offs during heat waves to allow people to use home air conditioning.

- Implement or expand programs that provide utility assistance, such as the low-income home energy assistance program or similar methods that provide financial assistance for home air conditioner use

Topics for Employee Training

- Information on COVID-19, how to prevent it from spreading, and which underlying health conditions may make individuals more susceptible to contracting the virus.

- Self-screening at home, including temperature and/or symptom checks using CDC guidelines.

- The importance of not coming to work if employees have a frequent cough, fever, difficulty breathing, chills, muscle pain, headache, sore throat, recent loss of taste or smell, or if they or someone they live with have been diagnosed with COVID-19.

- To seek medical attention if their symptoms become severe, including persistent pain or pressure in the chest, confusion, or bluish lips or face. Updates and further details are available on CDC's webpage.

- The importance of frequent handwashing with soap and water, including scrubbing with soap for 20 seconds (or using hand sanitizer with at least 60% ethanol or 70% isopropanol when employees cannot get to a sink or handwashing station, per CDC guidelines).

- The importance of physical distancing, both at work and off work time (see Physical Distancing section below).

- Proper use of face coverings, including:

  o Face coverings do not protect the wearer and are not personal protective equipment (PPE).

  o Face coverings can help protect people near the wearer, but do not replace the need for physical distancing and frequent handwashing.

  o Employees should wash or sanitize hands before and after using or adjusting face coverings.

  o Avoid touching eyes, nose, and mouth.

  o Face coverings should be washed after each shift.

Individual Control Measures and Screening

- Provide temperature and/or symptom screenings for all workers at the beginning of their shift and any personnel entering the facility. Non-employees entering the facility should be restricted to only those classified as essential by management and they must complete a temperature and/or symptom screening before entering. Make sure the temperature/symptom screener avoids close contact with workers to the extent possible. Both screeners and employees should wear face coverings for the screening.

- Encourage workers who are sick or exhibiting symptoms of COVID-19 to stay home.

- Employers should provide and ensure workers use all required protective equipment. Employers should consider where disposable glove use may be helpful to supplement frequent handwashing or use of hand sanitizer; examples are for workers who are screening others for symptoms or handling commonly touched items.

- Provide the necessary equipment and accommodations for line crews that may need to respond to grid disruption, including all required safety equipment for crews operating in areas with high numbers of infections.

- Face coverings are strongly recommended when employees, contractors, vendors, etc. are in the vicinity of others. Workers should have face coverings available and wear them at work, in offices, during service calls (except when there is the potential for arc flash or respiratory protection may be required), or in a vehicle for work-related travel when traveling with others. Face coverings must not be shared.

- Conduct daily safety briefings prior to field workers going on service calls and develop internal communications that can be regularly updated on the use of PPE and other mitigation requirements.

Cleaning and Disinfecting Protocols

- Perform thorough cleaning in high traffic areas, such as break rooms, lunch areas, and changing areas, and areas of ingress and egress, including stairways and stairwells, handrails, and elevator controls. Frequently disinfect commonly used surfaces, including doorknobs, toilets, and handwashing facilities.

- Clean touchable surfaces between shifts or between users, whichever is more frequent, including but not limited to working surfaces, tools,

handles and latches, and controls on stationary, hand-held, and mobile equipment (including surfaces in the cabs of vehicles, two-way radios, gas detectors, electricity meters, and controls in aerial lift buckets).

- Avoid sharing phones, handheld mobile communications, office supplies, other work tools, or equipment wherever possible. Individually-assigned peripheral equipment (keyboards, handsets, headsets, chairs, etc.) should be provided wherever possible. Never share PPE.

- Ensure that sanitary facilities stay operational and stocked at all times and provide additional soap, paper towels, and hand sanitizer when needed. Provide additional sanitary facilities if several workers need to take use the restroom at the same time, e.g., during scheduled breaks.

- Provide time for workers to implement cleaning practices before and after shifts. If cleaning is assigned to the worker, they must be compensated for that time.

- When choosing cleaning chemicals, employers should use product approved for use against COVID-19 on the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)-approved list and follow product instructions. Use disinfectants labeled to be effective against emerging viral pathogens, diluted household bleach solutions (5 tablespoons per gallon of water), or alcohol solutions with at least 70% alcohol that are appropriate for the surface. Provide employees training on manufacturer's directions and Cal/OSHA requirements for safe use. Workers using cleaners or disinfectants should wear gloves as required by the product instructions.

- For those field technicians using such equipment, require that hard hats and face shields be sanitized at the end of each shift. Clean the inside of the face shield, then the outside, then wash hands. Provide hand sanitizer to all field staff.

- Consider installing portable high-efficiency air cleaners, upgrading the building's air filters to the highest efficiency possible, and making other modifications to increase the quantity of outside air and ventilation in offices and other spaces.

- Modify offerings in on-site cafeterias, including using prepackaged foods, and safe options for drink, condiment, and flatware dispensing.

Physical Distancing Guidelines

- Implement measures to ensure physical distancing of at least six feet between workers. These can include use of physical partitions or visual cues (e.g., floor markings or signs to indicate where workers should stand).

- Develop a process workflow with questions and talking points for employees to use at the customer's door to identify suspected COVID-19 concerns. The workflow will give employees the flexibility to gauge the situation when the response requires entering a home/building.

- Contact customers before visits to confirm appointments and check if there are infected people on premises; check again when workers are at the door. Request customers use face coverings during the visit and maintain safe distancing of at least six feet from workers.

- Allow field personnel to call a "safety stop" when they are reluctant to enter a dwelling or other building. A field worker should call a supervisor and discuss essential vs. non-essential work and proper precautions to take.

- Limit exposure for field technicians and personnel by implementing remote diagnostics and self-install/repair strategies, e.g., support through video calls and instruction videos, wherever possible.

- Adjust safety meetings to ensure physical distance and implement smaller safety meetings at facilities to maintain physical distancing guidelines.

- Transition all meetings and interviews to phone or virtual platforms or hold outside or in a space allowing for at least six feet of physical distance between employees.

- Utilize work practices, when feasible, to limit the number of workers on-site at one time. This may include scheduling (e.g., staggering shift start/end times) or rotating access to a designated area during a shift. Stage facilities to stagger work and limit overlap of work crews. Place additional limitations on the number of workers in enclosed areas to ensure at least six feet of separation to limit transmission of the virus.

- Where physical distancing cannot be maintained, crews responding to outages or other service calls should drive separate vehicles if feasible. If not feasible, require that employees wear face coverings in the cab, keep the cab well ventilated, and do not reassign or comingle crew members.

- Stagger employee breaks, in compliance with wage and hour regulations, to maintain physical distancing protocols.

- Close breakrooms, use barriers, or increase distance between tables/chairs to separate workers and discourage congregating during breaks. Where possible, create outdoor break areas with shade covers and seating that ensures physical distancing.

- Designate separate entrances and exits and post signage to this effect.

- Reassign lockers or limit or stagger locker use to increase distance between employees.

- Information and communications technology resources should be appropriate to accommodate increased use of remote work arrangements consistent with business continuity plans, without compromising security. Consider conducting planned stress tests for these arrangements.

- For field workers operating in a restricted area or containment zone, organizations should consider:

  o Offering alternate lodging, such as mobile homes and RVs equipped with washer/dryers, showers, and kitchens.

  o Dividing workers into small teams and keeping those teams separated with assigned vehicles and different base camp/staging area locations. Consider rental options to keep the number of workers in a single vehicle low.

  o Instituting triple wellness checks with mandatory temperature and/or symptom screenings at arrival, at mid-shift, and when going off-duty, with a health survey.

Additional Considerations for Protecting Control Centers

- Identify essential employees to develop effective strategies for mitigating their risk of infection. Develop a plan if they need to be removed from the workforce.

- Crews on shift work schedules should be segregated. System operators should be split (days/nights or split individual shifts) between primary and backup control centers. Operating night shifts and day shifts in different locations will provide a 12-hour window between occupation to allow for enhanced cleaning.

- Outside visitors should not be allowed in control centers (e.g., no tours or non-essential personnel from the same organization).

- Consider which, if any, personnel can perform their jobs in spaces adjacent to an existing control room.

- In any scenario where a shift of control center personnel is not in the same room, the lines of communication between employees should remain open, clear, and easily accessible.

- Workstations should allow for at least six feet of space between employees. Take into account room design and other physical space limitations, including the placement of wiring that may restrict options for where workstations can be located. Physical barriers between employees can be used for additional protection when six feet of distance is not possible.

- Contractors/vendors should be screened with a health questionnaire and/or temperature check and have face coverings on before being allowed onsite for deliveries, repairs, etc. Access should be limited to critical activities only.

- Consider control room functions that can be performed remotely, like monitoring or data analytics.

- Control center support staff (engineering, transmission scheduling, compliance, etc.) should be allowed to work remotely (e.g., VPN) to the extent permissible.

- Logistics plans for housing operators onsite, including bedding, hygiene facilities, entertainment, and food accommodations, should be developed.

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