Message

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U.S. EPA REGION 7 COVID-19 UPDATE

APRIL 14, 2020

R7 Operational Status GREEN | *Region 7 Emergency Response Line is open 24/7 @ 913-281-0991.* | *On-Scene Coordinators are on duty for Emergency Response.*

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Thank you for reading EPA Region 7's COVID-19 Update email to States and Tribes. In the weeks ahead, we will share news and information through this Update to help create shared situational awareness with program staff, managers, and executives in the States and Tribes.

We have certainly seen similar scenes unfold as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. This has been a difficult time for our country, and for all of us here in Region 7 and the states of Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, and Nebraska, as well as the nine federally recognized Tribes: The Iowa Tribe of Kansas and Nebraska, Kickapoo Tribe in Kansas, Meskwaki Nation (Sac & Fox Tribe of the Mississippi in Iowa), Omaha Tribe of Nebraska and Iowa, Ponca Tribe of Nebraska, Prairie Band Potawatomi Nation, Sac & Fox Nation of Missouri in Kansas and Nebraska, Santee Sioux Nation, and the Winnebago Tribe of Nebraska.

Yet, we are all moving forward with purpose.

On Sunday, March 15, 2020, the EPA Administrator Andrew Wheeler announced to staff nationwide that he was authorizing voluntary unscheduled leave or unscheduled telework for all locations. Then on Sunday, March 22, 2020, local municipal and county governments in the Kansas City and St. Louis metropolitan areas announced "stay at home" executive

orders for all residents. EPA Region 7 Administrator Jim Gulliford activated the Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP) Pandemic Annex, requiring all staff to telework.

In this Region 7 COVID-19 Update, we share details on our operations, and list field activities that we have paused. While there are impacts on field activities, we continue making progress on many fronts through our remote operations. For details, read on in this issue of the Region 7 COVID-19 Update.

States – Grants

- EPA Region 7 completed the Performance Partnership Grant awards for Iowa, Kansas, Missouri and Nebraska. The funding supports the abilities of all four of our states to address pressing environmental problems and needs.
- EPA awarded $2.1 million in grant funding to assist Iowa, Kansas, Missouri and Nebraska to help schools and childcare facilities test for lead in drinking water systems. EPA's 3Ts (Training, Testing, and Taking Action) for Reducing Lead in Drinking Water in Schools will be used by the states to assist schools in implementing lead in drinking water testing, including identifying sources of lead such as fountains. **EPA Region 7 Administrator Jim Gulliford** said, "Knowing that no blood lead level is safe for our children, we are committed to continuing a collaborative approach with our state partners to address the threat of lead exposure and protect the health of our nation's most vulnerable."

Tribes – Grants

- EPA Region 7's Tribal Office grant project officers are working with tribal staff to prepare for new negotiations, and to answer questions about grants and the grants process.

R7 COVID-19 CHANGES

Activities that have changed due to COVID-19

Compliance and Enforcement: We are working to strike the right balance of working with the regulated community as COVID-19 impacts their ability to comply, while also ensuring the public is protected from violations that cause harm. While we are temporarily suspending all planned inspections to protect our people, we are still responding to serious threats and enforcing against serious violations.

- The Agency also recently announced a temporary policy on compliance that is designed to allow us to prioritize our resources by responding to acute risks and imminent threats, rather than routine monitoring and reporting. EPA staff were being inundated with calls and questions from both state regulators and the regulated community about how they should handle issues given the current situation we're in.
    - The temporary policy does not say that the COVID-19 pandemic is an excuse for exceeding pollutant limitations in permits, regulations and statutes.
    - EPA expects regulated entities to comply with all obligations and if they do not, the policy says that EPA will consider the pandemic, on a case-by-case basis, when determining an appropriate response.

Superfund and Emergency Management: It is important to know that during the COVID-19 pandemic, EPA maintains its ability to respond to human health or environmental emergencies at Superfund sites, or in any situation where we are called upon to address immediate risks from releases of chemical, oil, radiological, biological, and other hazardous materials.

EPA Delaying Some Superfund and RCRA Work to Limit Coronavirus Spread: In an April 10, 2020, news release, the EPA Administrator issued interim guidance to regional offices to ensure that decisions about new or ongoing cleanup activities at sites across the country are made with the health and safety of communities, state and tribal partners, EPA staff, and contractors as the priority.

- The interim guidance focuses on decision making at emergency response and longer-term cleanups sites where EPA is the lead agency or has direct oversight of, or responsibility for, the cleanup work. This includes, but is not limited to, Superfund cleanups, Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA) corrective actions, Toxic Substance and Control Act PCB cleanups, Oil Pollution Act spill responses, and Underground Storage Tank Program actions. In addition, EPA is sharing this guidance with states to take into consideration as they encounter similar issues at state-lead RCRA cleanup sites.
- The Superfund program has adjusted much of its planned field work and issued partial stop work orders to several contractors working on Superfund lead sites in Missouri and Kansas
- Meanwhile, the groundwater and additional private well sampling associated with the Syntex Facility Superfund Site in Verona, Mo., will be postponed and rescheduled.
- The suspension of work is a temporary measure to protect EPA employees, contractors and the public. We are periodically reassessing the decisions and are prepared to return to the field as soon as possible.

R7 PROGRAM UPDATES

Air and Radiation Division

[Acting Deputy Director Ben Krehbiel, Krehbiel.Ben@epa.gov]

- In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, KDHE and KDA strongly encouraged voluntary reductions in the number of acres planned for prescribed burns this spring by land managers within the Flint Hills. The EPA Region 7 Air and Radiation Division (ARD) has continued to consult with the state on the prescribed fires and the potential for downwind smoke impacts on public health.
- ARD's Ethylene Oxide Team has increased its support in providing technical expertise and assistance regarding medical sterilization facilities to states, local agencies and industry. The demands on medical facilities to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic is resulting in a corresponding increase in the demands on medical sterilization facilities that use ethylene oxide.

- ARD staff are providing oversight to states and tribes by reviewing air quality permits and continuing to review and publish Federal Register notices on State Implementation Plan approvals that help protect the National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS).

Water Division

[Deputy Director Diane Huffman, Huffman.Diane@epa.gov]

- The comment period has closed for Missouri Drinking Water Primacy Revisions, achieving another milestone of having all Primacy revisions completed for all EPA Region 7 states.
- The EPA Region 7 Water Division (WD) continues to hold weekly calls with State Drinking Water Primacy agencies to provide cross-state communication and gain knowledge of operator, supply or operation problems. Water systems continue to be run by certified operators.
- WD provided tribal operators with an Incident Action Checklist for Pandemic Incidents for Water Utilities. Tribal water utilities have been identified as essential, per the tribal governments. WD staff continue their weekly discussions with tribal operators to confirm their operating status.

Laboratory Services and Applied Science Division

[Deputy Director Michael Jay, Jay.Michael@epa.gov]

- Region 7's Laboratory Services and Applied Science Division continues to analyze air, water, and soil samples. The scientists analyzed 893 samples from March 15-28.

Superfund and Emergency Management Division

[Deputy Director Scott Hayes, Hayes.Scott@epa.gov]

- EPA Region 7's Superfund team continues to operate the 24/7 Spill Line and our responders are prepared to respond to emergency chemical or oil releases.
- Superfund is also moving forward on decision-making analyses and documentation for Superfund Sites.
- On Monday, April 13, 2020, the Region announced the Record of Decision (ROD) for the Hastings Superfund Site, Operable Unit 1, in Hastings, Nebraska. The ROD outlines the cleanup plan the Agency will implement to clean up contaminated groundwater at the site. The cleanup plan combines continued groundwater extraction via the existing Whalen Energy Center well field and Well D to address residual groundwater contamination; treatment of extracted groundwater via beneficial use as non-contact cooling water; and a long-term monitoring program to monitor performance and effectiveness of the cleanup.

Land, Chemical and Redevelopment Division

[Deputy Director John Smith, Smith.John@epa.gov]

- **From Triage to Recovery—Pruitt Igoe to Become a New Medical Campus in St. Louis**: What was once a site that seemed hopeless for the North St. Louis community is well on its way to becoming a new medical school. Working with the city and state staff, EPA helped complete a risk assessment and accompanying soil management plan, and

a detailed topographic survey, clearing the way for non-residential redevelopment opportunities. Ponce Health Sciences University recently announced an $80 million investment to develop a new medical campus on the former Pruitt Igoe site.

- The Springfield geographic initiative continues. The team is carrying out its planning and product development for this major public education campaign that will address the risks from lead exposure and the need for proper integrated pest management approaches.
- The pesticide team is helping state agriculture departments and industry on certifications for pesticide applicators.
- Disinfectants and disinfectant wipes have been important topics due to COVID-19. The team has continued to educate the public on the importance of ensuring disinfectants have been registered through EPA.

Enforcement and Compliance Assurance Division, and Office of Regional Counsel

[ECAD Deputy Director Wendy Lubbe, Lubbe.Wendy@epa.gov; ORC Deputy Skelley.Dana@epa.gov]

- Drinking water is a top priority. As an example, we recently issued a compliance order to one of the tribes in Kansas that continued to violate the Safe Drinking Water Act and put people at risk through multiple failures to monitor and report drinking water samples. WD, ECAD and Counsel are working together closely to ensure that our citizens have safe, clean drinking water – one of EPA's most important functions.
- WD approved a backlogged 303(d) list and TMDL and began consultation with the Region's tribes regarding the forthcoming state Impaired Waters Lists.

Web Resources

- Coronavirus.gov
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
- EPA Coronavirus (COVID-19) Information
- Frequent Questions about Coronavirus (COVID-19)
- List N: List of Disinfectants for use Against Coronavirus (COVID-19)
- Coronavirus (COVID-19) and Drinking Water and Wastewater
- COVID-19 Enforcement and Compliance Resources
- EPA COVID-19 Press Releases
- EPA Region 7

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