

November 18, 2009

2009-2010 Flu Virus Contingency Planning Information for Owners and Operators of Municipal Residential Drinking Water Systems and Sewage Works

This flu season we have to be prepared for both the seasonal flu and the H1N1 flu. To that end, many owners/operators of drinking water systems and sewage works are undertaking contingency planning for potentially higher than normal staff absenteeism.

In the event of unusually high absenteeism, for example as a result of the H1N1 flu, the ministry has the authority to allow system owners and operators to make special, temporary, staffing and other arrangements. Owners and operators would still be required to make sure environmental safeguards are met and that public health is not compromised. The ministry would retain regulatory oversight to ensure the necessary sampling and monitoring requirements continue to take place.

The ministry is providing you with this bulletin so that you may plan accordingly.

Please contact the **Spills Action Centre** at 1-800-268-6060 or 416-325-3000 if you begin to experience staffing pressures associated with the outbreak.

What kind of alternative arrangements could be available in the event of a severe outbreak of the flu virus?

Depending on the severity of the outbreak, alternative arrangements may be permitted related to some specific operator certification/licence, sampling, and administrative requirements.

Who could perform the duties of certified/licensed operators?

Under certain circumstances, the ministry would consider formal applications that would permit owners/operators to utilize the following personnel to temporarily perform the duties of certified/licensed operators:

- Operators who have held a drinking water certificate or wastewater licence in the applicable category at any time since August 1, 2004.
- Previous or current managers or supervisors responsible for drinking water systems or sewage works.

- Other technical staff currently employed in the drinking water system or sewage works provided that they have more than five years of experience in the drinking water system or sewage works and are not performing Operator-in-charge or Overall Responsible Operator duties.
- Professional Engineers would be allowed to perform operating duties and be designated as the Overall Responsible Operators if they have previous experience working in a drinking water system or sewage works.

The ministry suggests that owners and operating authorities begin to develop a list of eligible and available personnel to have as reference, in case they are needed.

Who else could conduct sampling and operational testing?

In addition, the ministry will consider allowing selected sampling and operational testing to be done by a person who:

- Has been trained by a certified/licensed operator to conduct the test, and
- Works under the supervision of a certified/licensed operator, and
- Immediately advises a certified or licensed operator of all test results.

Under what conditions could you request alternative arrangements?

Owners could request alternative arrangements when:

- As a result of a severe outbreak of the flu virus, staff absenteeism has reached a point where there are no longer enough certified/licensed staff available to complete essential operational and maintenance tasks, and
- The owner/operating authority has transferred all available certified/licensed staff to positions focused on essential maintenance and operation activities.

How do you make a request to allow for alternative arrangements regarding the operation of your facility?

Contact the Spills Action Centre at 1-800-268-6060 or 416-325-3000. Requests will be assessed on a case-by-case basis.

For more information on the H1N1 flu virus, contact your local public health unit or visit the Ministry of Health and Long-term Care's H1N1 web page at www.ontario.ca/flu.

For general inquiries about this bulletin, please contact the ministry's Public Information Centre at 1-800-565-4923.