

OPERATIONS & WATER QUALITY COMMITTEE
SUMMARY MINUTES
February 6, 2019
4:15 p.m.

ATTENDANCE

Directors: Judy Huang (Chair), John Weed

Staff: Steve Peterson, Jennifer Solito, Robert Ells, Mike Wickham, Tim Mathews, Kathleen Roberts, Johanna Sayo, Thomas Spankowski

SP AGM

DISCUSSION TOPICS

1. Specialty Contractors for Contaminated Work Sites: Steve Peterson, Manager of Operations and Maintenance, and Robert Ells, Distribution Maintenance Division (DMD) Manager, introduced the topic explaining DMD crews can potentially come across contaminated soils or groundwater conditions when responding to water main or service line leaks anywhere within the District's service area. Mr. Ells described a situation that occurred last year when a DMD construction crew came across a potentially contaminated construction site. This incident demonstrated the need for both specialty contractor services and additional safety training of DMD crews for both planned and unplanned work in potentially contaminated areas within the District's service area.

In response to last year's incident, Kathleen Roberts, Health & Safety Officer, and Tim Mathews, DMD Supervisor, described a new Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) that has been developed for District crews to follow for planned and unplanned work in contaminated areas. Ms. Roberts stated the SOP includes requirements for using engineering controls (e.g., handheld analyzers for air monitoring and trench ventilation systems), completing documentation forms and wearing personal protective equipment (PPE). Ms. Roberts explained that comprehensive classroom and field training of DMD staff on using the new SOP has been conducted and then she demonstrated the use of a handheld air monitor. Mr. Mathews reviewed the workflow for crews to follow to determine whether a work site should be considered as a hazardous site for DMD personnel. If a planned or unplanned work site remains hazardous after engineering controls have been implemented, the DMD Supervisor will direct DMD personnel not to proceed with the work and will then contact a specialty contractor to perform the work necessary to reduce the site contamination levels sufficiently to allow DMD personnel to work under safe conditions.

Johanna Sayo, Environmental Specialist, provided an overview of staff's approach on contracting with a consulting firm to provide specialty contractor services for both planned and unplanned work in contaminated areas. Ms. Sayo explained that a team of District stakeholders are currently developing a scope of work for Requests for Proposals (RFPs) for selecting a consulting firm. The draft scope of work includes requirements for responding to phone calls from DMD Supervisors within a specified timeframe, performing the necessary environmental investigations of contaminated sites to determine the best management practice for reducing site contamination levels sufficiently to allow DMD personnel to work under safe conditions (i.e., preparing a clean corridor), legally managing the disposal of any

hazardous soils and groundwater from the contaminated site, and quickly demobilizing to allow DMD personnel to proceed with its work. Ms. Sayo stated the plan is to have the Board award a contract with a single consultant who will be responsible for managing and sub-contracting for the required specialty contractor services. The RFP document will specify an initial contract period and additional one-year extensions for a total contract period of five years provided the services have been satisfactory to the District. The estimate for a contract totaling five years is \$300,000. Consultants submitting RFPs will be ranked based on criteria that will include a firm's qualifications, expertise and experience.

Mr. Ells explained that DMD would like to leverage the approach underway for having specialty contractor services available for contaminated work sites to having contractors available to augment DMD staff in emergency and disaster situations. As an example, Mr. Ells explained DMD needed to utilize the services of an outside contractor for the deep excavation and installation of shoring associated with the 16-inch main break and sinkhole on Alvarado Boulevard in Union City in 2015. The initial repair work could have been accelerated had the District had a contract in place for emergency and disaster recovery work.

Staff responded to the following questions from Directors Huang and Weed. Director Huang asked whether the handheld air monitors are properly calibrated and whether the new SOP includes a requirement for checking District Geographic Information System (GIS) maps for plume locations and type of contaminants. Director Weed asked about the District's ability to identify the parties responsible for contaminated sites to allow the District to bill the appropriate parties and asked whether the District could coordinate and share with other agencies for the use of specialty contractors.

2. Transition Plan for Combining Operator Workgroups into One Job Classification: Steve Peterson, Manager of Operations and Maintenance, provided a brief chronological overview of the staffing evaluation efforts associated directly and indirectly with the Water Production Division (WPD) since the shutdown of the Mission San Jose Water Treatment Plant (MSJWTP) in 2015 including the Koff & Associates staffing assessment of the entire District in 2016 and a more focused workforce optimization study of WPD performed by EMA, Inc. in 2017. Mike Wickham, Water Production Manager, then provided a summary of EMA's findings and recommendations. One of the more significant findings and the topic for the remainder of the Committee meeting were the advantages of combining the two operator groups into one workgroup and the approach for making this transition.

The purpose of combining the Water Treatment Plant Operator (WTPO) group and the Treatment Facility Operator (TFO) group into one job classification includes:

- a) Balancing the workloads between the two operator workgroups. The TFO staffing reductions through attrition associated with the shutdown of MSJWTP created challenges in TFOs having the capacity to satisfactorily perform their required duties. Having two separate operator groups with unique job classification descriptions constrained management's ability to transfer work tasks between the two groups.

- b) Increasing flexibility for staffing open shifts that are vacant due to vacations, illnesses, and resignations. Having one combined workgroup with one job classification maximizes the number of operators that are potentially available to fill vacant shifts.
- c) Minimizing overtime levels to reduce overtime costs and the risk of employee burnout. Having one combined workgroup with one job classification maximizes the number of operators that are potentially available to fill vacant shifts and correspondingly would reduce overtime levels.

Mr. Wickham explained there are multiple challenges associated with combining the two operator workgroups including:

- a) The lack of operator confidence based on the perception there's too much to learn for an operator to be competent in simultaneously operating and monitoring three production facilities with differing treatment processes and a complicated distribution system.
- b) The potential reluctance of current operators to cross-train to become skilled at performing new tasks and assuming new responsibilities.
- c) Developing new training and guideline materials geared to journey-level operators already familiar with a facility or system, but will need a document to occasionally reference to confirm proper and accurate operating procedures and protocols.
- d) Making administrative and facility modifications to improve operator workflow efficiency, reduce treatment process monitoring time, and reduce the risk of needing to travel to a distribution system facility in response to an equipment failure alarm.

To meet the challenges described above, Mike Wickham reviewed a draft transition plan for combining the two operator workgroups into one job classification. The transition plan is currently considered a draft since it is still a work in progress. The plan is divided into three phases and spans approximately four and a half years that began in May 2018. Phase 1 is currently underway and its purpose is to lay the groundwork for successfully combining the two operator workgroups. The scope of Phase 1 includes reviewing existing operator training materials and developing new training and guideline materials geared to journey-level operators; making administrative and facility modifications to improve operator workflow efficiency, reduce treatment process monitoring time and improve distribution system reliability; and changing management expectations on staff's responses to after-hour equipment failures at production facilities. Phase 2 covers operator cross-training activities; adjusting day-shift and night-shift staffing levels; and continuing to make further facility improvements to reduce treatment process monitoring time and improve distribution system reliability. The tentative timeframe for beginning Phase 2 is summer 2020. Phase 3 is tentatively scheduled to begin in summer 2021 and its purpose is to fine-tune and optimize the activities that began in Phase 2 including the scheduling and assignment of work tasks; and revising training materials and other documentation to reflect lessons learned and modified work procedures.

Director Weed expressed support of having operator staffing at levels to handle routine operations as opposed to levels for handling unplanned events such as a nighttime equipment failure that could cause a reduction in the production rate of a production facility or take a production facility offline entirely until repairs can be made during the following workday.

Mr. Peterson explained this operational approach is already in place in the Distribution Maintenance Division with the practice of ranking the severity of nighttime water main and service line leaks for the purpose of “holding” leak repair work until a subsequent business day to reduce overtime hours worked and the associated costs. Director Huang stated she supports delaying production facility repairs until maintenance staff is available the next business day provided the District continuously meets its Mission Statement and District customers are not adversely affected. Director Weed suggested that situational exercises covering various nighttime equipment failures be included in the transition plan operator training program.

3. Public Comments: There were no public comments received.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Topics discussed by the Committee were informational only and no recommendations were made.